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Discourses of Agency and Community:
Northern Women Administrators

by

Lori Anne Campbell ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

Educational Administration and Leadership

Department of Educational Policy Studies

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To Ernest DeWalt, the investigation of a crime seemed not at all dissimilar to the writing of a crime story. As an investigator, he began always with a few known facts, as many as, like the sweet cream of invention, might float readily to the surface. Thus equipped, the investigator, the storyteller, in any case an outsider miles and hours from the radiant heart of the genesis of these truths, would then mix a mortar of possible truths - that is, an honest fiction - and with this putty piece the larger chunks together, hard truth with pliable truth, adding and subtracting bit by bit, ascribing muscle and bone until a working model was formed, an acceptable truth, an agreement of imaginations; something all concerned could live with.

Such truth, he told himself, is, after all, how history is formed. It is what our lives, looking back, become.

Randall Silvis, An Occasional Hell

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Discourses of Agency and Community: Northern Women Administrators* submitted by Lori Anne Campbell in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated with love to my husband, Julian Barry Snell, the world's greatest storyteller.

ABSTRACT

This research utilizes post-structuralist discourse analysis to examine the working stories of women administrators in the Northwest Territories. Central to the work was constraints and opportunities for women as they negotiated their organizational roles and responsibilities. The work examines the nature of agency as it is related to these discursive structures, and also looks at the ways women employ various strategies to work at the juncture of competing discourses. An understanding of agency as it is related both to post-structuralist descriptions of multiple subjectivities as well as ethical engagement is suggested as a frame for understanding the ways in which women engage with discourse.

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The writing of this dissertation has traversed a fair amount of time and geography, and so has been contributed to and supported by a great many. I deeply appreciate the involvement in this work and my life of the following people:

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And to my family…

When my daughter Jesse was a baby, I took her to Halifax and wrote upstairs in the den while downstairs my sister, Dr. Sue Campbell, tried to coax Jesse to roll over. I've done many of the most challenging parts of this writing in the company of Sue and her partner Jan over the years, and Sue has provided editing input at various critical junctures. Dr. Katy Campbell, my other sister, has also provided me with the same mix of help, sisterly care and intellectual support and guidance, and I think how wonderful and rare this is to be able to find all of this in your sisters. I also want to thank my brother-in-law Rick Roder and my niece Courtney Bonar for all they have done to support me over the last few years.

To my sweet Jesse, much love, not for her help with the *end* of this but for the start of so many other wonderful things for me.

And to you, Barry, my love and thanks and the promise to be much more help around the cabin this summer.

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PROLOGUE: MEETING THE BAND MANAGERS

1993

I offered, when I was new to my position as director of Community Programs for Aurora College to address a meeting of the Band Managers in Fort Simpson, N.W.T. The Dehcho Tribal council, the umbrella group for band managers, was hosting a three day workshop in Fort Simpson, and I thought this would be an opportune time to introduce myself to community members, and perhaps come away from the meeting with several program possibilities in my pocket. I made the offer to the Executive Director of the tribal council who accepted and named the place and time.

When I arrived at the meeting, everyone was still involved in a presentation and I sat to one side, waiting for my turn. The longer I sat, the more nervous I became as I listened to what appeared to be a fairly contentious debate about an issue. After waiting 20 minutes or so, the meeting turned to me. I introduced myself, explained my position, and declared myself eager to work with them in their communities. Then I opened the floor to questions. What followed was an intense grilling about the shortcomings of the college, the inability of college administrators to understand or address the needs of the communities, and the insecurity and reluctance of the administration to support the aims of First Nations people in that region. Questions were fired rapidly and confrontationally and, because I was new, most I couldn't answer. I felt myself sliding into rhetoric that made little sense, even to me. I stopped being able to hear the gist of the questions and only wanted the meeting to be over.

In the end, when I was abruptly dismissed, I thanked everyone for "sharing their concerns." Realizing just how false that sounded, I made one last attempt to inject myself into the room. "Yeah, thanks, " I said, grimacing, mocking myself; "That was great." Everyone laughed. "I'll bet you enjoyed that," the director said. "I'm a professional, I can take it." I responded. Everyone laughed again, and I fled to the safety of my hotel room, determined never to emerge.

The dissonance I felt after that meeting gave rise to a host of questions I had the opportunity to pay some attention to through this research. Foremost among these was what had actually changed for me after that meeting. Was it some essential version of myself in my new administrative role? More particularly, did the meeting give me a nudge in the direction of a more critical understanding of the ambiguities that arise when you deal with contexts that are, in a significant way, unknown and unknowable to you? What does or should this dissonance call forth in terms of my own response? I had an opportunity at the time of the meeting and afterwards as I reflected on the experience, to think carefully about what my relationship with the Band Managers and other administrators and members of Aboriginal communities should look like. I did not have the conceptual framework, however, when I first began working in the North that I needed to locate that experience within the broader ethical context of my work. I was too much the storyteller then – reflective but not *reflexive* enough perhaps, to see how I was positioned in these conversations by my social and historical place. I didn't understand at the time how that positioning constrained my responses but also freed me to construct different roles, different relationships.

My work continued with the Band Managers over the next few years, during the time I was involved in community based adult education for the college. My subsequent dealings with them bore little resemblance to our initial introduction to each other. I can see now, in retrospect, that I was not the only one faced with historical constructions and ambiguous relationships; all of us were confronting particular constructions in that room. From the Band Managers' position, the politics of the situation would bring forth a certain response, "as a white organization you do not understand us and you do not know how to help us." This discourse of non-compliance would accomplish two outcomes, two sides of the same coin. As they rejected my offers of help, they were at the same time, positioning themselves as future petitioners for the resources I represented. This, in turn, positioned me outside of the possibilities of a particular kind of working relationship, and because I was positioned so, there was no acknowledgement in the room of how the meeting may have been difficult for me and no opportunity for me to acknowledge how I really felt. They were in the room as a collective and I imagine, would have found it very difficult to speak other than in a collective voice, framed for them by the leader of the Aboriginal organization that served as the umbrella for the group and who led the questioning. This is the kind of analysis I can think about now that was not part of my understanding at that time.

This story is several years old now and much has happened in my life since that meeting. I was much younger, and as I think about it now, certainly a great deal more naïve about the work. Bringing the great social atmosphere of my life and home with me, I was foolish enough at one point, to suggest a meeting over a beer to someone in an Aboriginal organization whom I'd never met and who, one could safely bet, might be involved in some manner with issues of sobriety, since at that time most organizations were. Naiveté is a reoccurring theme for me.

I moved from my work with the communities, on to what I thought was the more predictable life of the college campus, but found this was not the case. There were complexities to this work, too, of a different kind but now I could not shrug my shoulders and claim that the circumstances were difficult and everyone struggles with them, and rack it up to the mysterious realm of missed understandings in a cross-cultural context. I supervised staff who, like me, were largely non-Aboriginal and worked and lived in a typical community college setting – nothing mysterious there. Why, then, was this work so much more difficult and so much more threatening? It was here that more familiar difficulties with gender and leadership surfaced. I was able to frame them academically, but although this "normalized" my experiences in some way, the explanations I told others and myself did little to lessen my unease around the competence of my administrative style and why I came to doubt myself in that way.

The story of my own work in the N.W.T., which I return to in the subsequent Chapters of this research, reflects a move towards more reflexive story telling and away from the role of storyteller, though the latter role is often less ambiguous for others and far more entertaining. Many of my southern family and friends wanted me to tell stories of a place they were never likely to see. It is significant that the longer I worked in the North, the fewer stories I was able to tell and the less I was sought out to tell them. My growing uncertainty and ambivalence around what I was doing when I was telling stories of my experience made me uneasy with the role. It became increasingly problematic for me to position myself as the subject of the stories, so much of the context was left out. As I hope to demonstrate through the subsequent Chapters of this research, my own stories and particularly my approach to telling them, became like trying to focus on an especially difficult camera shot of a landscape. The lens captures an image but the photographer is dissatisfied with the subject of the picture and scans the horizon, looking for better locations, better anchors for the shot. Like photography, telling a story presents the subject position as problematic – how do I tell a story that does not deny the subject position, but whose frame includes enough of the context so that the audience sees the picture with all of its complexities. The subject position is at once, both decentered and central to the narrative.

As illustration, I wrote the story of the meeting with the Band Managers several years ago when I was constructing a draft of my thesis proposal. I wrote it down for several purposes: To test the idea that these stories might hold some research interest, to check my own capabilities as a story-teller, to give the readers a sense of what I meant by "story," but also to satisfy my own curiosity about a forming event in my own career as a woman administrator in the North. This event changed me in some significant way, because it abruptly and permanently shifted my understandings about what my working life was going to be like. The dissonance between my understandings and my previous teaching experiences and how unpredictable my administrative experiences turned out to be was something I continued to struggle with.

Graduate school was not the first setting in which this story had been told, however. I told it to my friend in Hay River that day, from my hotel room, and made it a funny story, so we could laugh about it. This helped at the time, because I felt very badly about how the meeting had gone and a little frightened about the work ahead. I told it to my supervisor when I returned to Fort Smith, but this time I was the reflective storyteller, using the circumstances to have a meeting about issues we needed to address in that region. I wrote it down in a letter to my sister in Halifax, mostly as entertainment. I used the story for empathetic purposes to reveal something personal about myself to a new employee I supervised when he came to me with a similar story of a difficult meeting.

Each telling of the story, as a result of my own intentions, tried to present the events in different ways, but each time I was the subject, my feelings and impressions the most important piece. It was not until much later in my Northern career that I saw my central role in these stories as awkwardly constructed. The lens is firmly on me, with the rest of the context, the band managers and their role in the work, the historical placement of us in that room, the reasons we came together at that meeting and the relationship choices that were foreshadowed, always out of focus. Hardin (2001) remarks that "one spokesperson can author many stories, yet those stories are always created from collectives that are speaking through the individual" (Hardin, 2001, p. 14). The collectives who influenced how I positioned myself in these stories, and more importantly, as Hardin asks, "what is achieved from these positionings?" are questions just out of focus.

Storytelling

My own stories of my work in the Northwest Territories appear throughout this research as well as those of other women I came to know professionally and personally over the years in the north. My working life was such that I had many opportunities to work with women on various projects and programs, and it is my remembering of this work and my relationships with these women as well as my own puzzlings over the meaning of my work that gave rise to my interest in this research. Before I continue with the discussion of the purpose of this thesis, however, I want to take this opportunity to describe in more detail what I mean by "stories" in this context. Here I borrow a distinction from Hardin's work (2001) where she refers to two structural concepts of storytelling: "The first concept differentiates the storyteller into two "I's: the 'I' who is telling the story, the author, and the 'I' who is the character being represented in the story being told" (p.13). Hardin admits to a pragmatic approach that simultaneously employs "I" as if it presupposes language while at the same time, recognizing that 'I' is also an historical and social construction. She distinguishes between the I-author and I-character so as to avoid the trap of representation, the author retelling a story as an exact representation of an experience (Scott, 1992). This distinction, Hardin believes, also helps us to understand the I-author's intentions in constructing the story in a particular way for a particular effect much as I described my retelling intentions of the story of the Band Managers' meeting.

This distinction, (I-author, I-character) also enables a particular focus on analysis that moves away from the truth value of the story itself and focuses instead on the choices I-authors make on how they represent themselves as characters in the stories. In this way, the audience becomes "imagined," and the relationship between the author and this audience becomes central to the analysis. This conceptualization of the audience further moves the analysis away from content to effect. In this research, I was interested in the storyteller, rather than the story; the effect and practice of the narration rather than the events and characters themselves.

Further, stories are anchored in a particular time, but while we may know what comes before and what may come after, this apparent linear sequencing of events is not how a story – written, oral or remembered – presents itself. There is a logic and sequence to events that we can culturally agree upon (I could not talk about making a phone call to my friend about the Band Managers' meeting as coming before my presentation to them), but the content of stories, as I found out and as I know from my own, presents a weaving together of many stories and meanings – culturally intelligible but also an effect of the storytelling context. The context includes what is *not* said as well.

The stories that I tell throughout this research about my own experiences of work co-mingle with the stories of other women administrators, some collected intentionally through interviews as part of the formal process of the research, but others collected from the past and revisited in later conversation, or written down after unplanned encounters and conversations. Once I became attuned to and interested in what other woman administrators were telling me through their stories, the daily work context seemed to yield a rich and endless capacity for these reflections. In this research I captured only some of the wealth of these stories of seven women in particular. These women, whose stories appear in this research, were all involved in administrative or leadership positions in the Northwest Territories, they all had stories of "coming North," from other parts of Southern Canada, and all were engaged in programs or policy related to education in the North.

In Chapter One, I discuss my initial research interests and subsequent alterations to these interests in more detail, including both to illustrate the parallel process of development of my own analytical interest. At that time I began my doctoral work, I was exposed to readings and research in the area of post-structuralism and post-modernism, and it was my first exposure, most significantly, to any discussion around the concepts of subjectivity and the self. I had not considered, before, the self as anything other than who

I was and would always be, allowing for how maturity and life experiences shaped me. I began to view my "data" in a different light and these shifts in my research perspective are also included in this text in the service of completeness. I saw how the act of storytelling was a discursive event, and that discourse analysis could lead me to understanding the professional lives of women administrators as discursive objects of this inquiry. Their narration of their life events provided an opportunity to see how they understood themselves and how their self and identity were constructed. As I reflected on and wrote my own stories, it became clear that these narrations were far from stable representations. The various ways we could tell the *same* story meant that narrative possibilities could deepen our understandings of how we constructed our own identities or as Giddens (1991) puts it, "engage in the reflexive project of the self" (p. 53).

My evolving understanding of my own storytelling life was the starting point of an analytical direction that led me to post-structuralist discourse analysis for this research. As I worked with the stories of the participants, my analytical focus turned to two interrelated problems: what is the notion of agency in women administrators' lives and is there room for a robust sense of agency given the fragmentation of our narratives when faced with discursive structures that constrain our intentions? This meant looking at agency from a post-structuralist angle that rejected a modern notion of agency as an achievement of autonomous actions of a unified, coherent and rational self. In other words, I grappled with the problem of the possibility of an agentic life as it is entangled with discursive structures. In doing so, I looked at the ways in which women administrators subvert, embrace and reject the discursive constructions of their working lives. However, a conceptualization of agency as a self-referential term still lacked context for me – something was still missing.

One of the troubling aspects of storytelling for me became the blurred background of those who populated my working life, mainly Aboriginal students and communities in the Northwest Territories. I reduced my life at times to entertaining vignettes; this was the discursive construction I was pressed towards. I was increasingly dissatisfied with my ability to tell a story that foregrounded the ethical dimensions of my work. What were missing for me were the intertwined narratives of commitment, ethics and relationships, which would have brought my Northern life into fuller focus for both myself and my audience. I am both subject and object of this work, turning my gaze inward for an understanding of myself as storyteller, and as a woman administrator, but also as a participant in a storied context that came to demand a much fuller accounting. Accordingly, this research begins in Chapter One with my story of first coming North and my reflections on that story. This is the starting point of my analysis as I begin the process of interrogating myself as author and story participant. Chapter One also broadens the context and purpose of the thesis.

Each chapter of this research describes, as a sub-theme, the movement of my own narrative voice and stance throughout the complexities of my Northern career, as well as my evolving understanding of the context of my work. Each chapter also interrogates a particular story or two in depth, setting them against specific theoretical constructs, which illuminate and describe aspects of the narrative event. The chapters are presented in this way to allow for adequate depth to the analysis of complex issues such as our identities as woman administrators and how our agency is theorized and described. Post-structuralist analysis requires that the plurality of both themes and voices be present throughout the thesis, which is why concepts such as "agency" reappear in later chapters after they have been initially introduced, and the writing circles back to earlier understandings and reflections. Just as we would story ourselves differently, depending on the imagined audience, so concepts such as "agency" stand in for a complex assemblage of actions and intentions.

Conclusion

Recently, in a meeting with an Aboriginal colleague, he made an observation about his lack of adequate language to describe a cross-cultural phenomenon and then invited my comments. The concept he was talking about did not have an adequate translation in English. A silence fell in his office as he waited expectantly for me to speak. I cleared my throat nervously, as I did so many years ago at the Band Managers' meeting, and offered what I thought, what I hoped, was an appropriate response. I thought to myself about the possibilities of this working relationship, at its beginning, and how I was again in a position of both choice and constraint. I am in an enduring project of constructing my narrative life in this work with Aboriginal education; the work, as well, of constructing narratives of difference, relationship and possibilities. As I chose my words carefully with my colleague, I understood that I was creating a relationship and beginning the process of establishing who I am, what I care about and for, and what he might reasonably expect of me as a non-Aboriginal colleague (Walker, 1998). I hoped as well, though, that should my narrative voice crack or trail off, that it would not be the last opportunity to establish who I *am*. While I may position myself differently next time we meet, through choice or constraint, at this time, I care deeply about one *self* that starts as an anchor for our relationship. Whether, in post-structuralist terms, that self is an illusion or worse - an exaggerated ambition that turns aside other questions around the ethical frame of my agency - is a question that continues to engage me both theoretically and practically as a woman administrator.

CHAPTER ONE: GOING NORTH

This research is about the working lives of women educators in the Northwest Territories. Their stories are part of the rich tapestry of experiences that have been remembered and shared through countless stories and story tellers from all parts of the North. There is a certain timelessness to the stories of "How I Came North," with their plot line of rugged adventure and the unknown[i]. The North wasn't part of my planned career path, but in 1986, while teaching English as a Second Language at Alberta Vocational Centre in Edmonton, I answered an S.O.S. call from Arctic College (now Aurora College). The Director of Community Programs was scouring Alberta for an adult educator willing to teach in a small, isolated community called Lac La Martre (now Wha ti). I had never heard of the community and knew little about the Northwest Territories, but the adventure appealed and within a fortnight, I was landing on the small, gravel airstrip that served Wha ti.

During my phone interview, the director asked me how I thought I would cope both with the isolation of a "fly-in" community and the cross-cultural nature of the work. It was an interview for a job so I responded positively on both accounts, but in reality, I had no idea what the work or the community would be like. The closest experience I could offer was my summer vacations at Ma-Me-O Beach in Alberta, a small summer village on First Nations reserve land (which brought forth hearty laughter from the interviewer). Like many others before and since, I loaded up on teaching materials and dried goods and hoped for the best.

---

[i] "They seemed, some of them, to be infused with a sense of high mission, and ardent commitment to Do Good, even if it meant having to live in great isolation and going into an awful climate and enduring a deprived existence amongst strange, incomprehensible people far from the comforts and benefits of civilization. For myself, all these things that seemed rather negative to some of the others were excitingly positive. I really didn't care a fig for the civilized amenities we would leave behind. The chance to go North was a chance to enter a time machine and, at least in my youthful, romantic mind, to voyage backwards a hundred years or more to an earlier, more pristine continent, to the days when North America was still a wilderness and the aboriginal people were still the real part of the populations. I felt myself to be part of a select corps of privileged pioneers" (Cloughey, 1995, p. 26).

The end of my first week in the classroom found me, much to my alarm, sobbing in the Principal's office. None of my carefully thought out lesson plans were working, everybody was speaking Dogrib, and I was convinced they all hated me and I would never last. Jim, the principal, listened patiently and then said, "I'll go talk to them." He did that while I cowered in his office, and when he returned he simply and gently told me that I did not yet understand my work, the culture or the people. The students believed everything was fine. They liked the class and me and were mystified by Jim's re-telling of my story. I am moved now to think of how badly they felt, how hard they tried, over the few days following the principal's talk and until we became comfortable together in the classroom, to mitigate what they must have sensed was my loneliness. They reached out to me, taking me berry picking and fishing in my brand new Hudson's Bay winter parka which came home christened with fish scales and blood.

Wha ti turned out to be a gentle introduction to teaching in the North. Despite my naiveté, the learners and the community were patient and forgiving of my mistakes. I worked in the absence of any political insight on the nature of my position as a teacher and what my being non-native, a woman and middle class would mean in the construction of the meaning of my role in the community. At the time, I was preoccupied with leaving home for the first time and I had neither the academic nor experiential background that would have prepared me to think about the teaching assignment in the wider context of work with Aboriginal students in the North. Were I to start again, my anticipation would be influenced by the political nature of the work as much as by what supplies to take with me. Nonetheless, despite my blundering through that initial cross-cultural experience, there was a generosity extended to me that allowed the program to become an accepted part of the community's educational network. As much as I puzzled about the meaning of my work, the students in the program saw opportunities of one sort or another that informed the value of literacy beyond the companionable dailyness of our lives together in the classroom.

I had had a week long orientation to the work when I first arrived in Yellowknife, but the outreach upgrading programs were not fully formed then, and I think of that time as more of an opportunity for us to find our sea legs. I was regaled with stories, many tongue in cheek, about the hardships awaiting me. I was warned to watch out for everything from wakeful bears to unlicensed pilots. The College staff must have sensed I was up to such ribbing and luckily I was, or I would have been scared to death.

When I came home at Christmas that first year, I was a sought after party guest. No one in my circle of friends or family had had such an adventure and everyone wanted to ask, "so, what's the North like?" Good question. I was still sorting through the experiences myself, so I wasn't really sure how to respond. It is like your lives, I thought. I go to work and come home, worry about my teaching, accept dinner invitations on Saturday, watch TV. But it is also so unlike your lives in the absolute stillness of isolation, the traditional activities, the northern lights, the experience of being white in another culture. How to explain what it was really like? So I became a storyteller[ii].

[ii] I am no longer employed by the same college as I was when I initially began this dissertation. I have moved to a new position where I continue to work in the field of Aboriginal education.

It is in this sense that I came to this research, as teller and interpreter of both others' stories and mine. This is a position I am happy with and want to claim at the outset, for it is this position that enlivens my own understandings and one that I heavily rely on to explain my research (and Northern life) to others.

There is a little more angst in my stories these days. I am more reflective now and more troubles me about the work I do as an administrator of adult education programs. The experiences, good and bad, are accumulating and my own story is getting harder to separate from the stories of communities and colleagues. I do not return to the South as the conquering heroine anymore, but as a woman trying to make sense of my northern life. This is, on the whole, a positive development, although I am nostalgic for the naiveté of my Wha ti days, and realize that this naiveté arose from wanting, like Pratt (1984), to remain like a child with no responsibility. I have more responsibility now for many learners and other staff. And I am much more cognizant of my historical place in the North and the politics of privilege and poverty. I am also more engaged with the political and social aspects of communities and cannot ignore them within the safety of my classroom walls. I am both much more accountable and vulnerable for the decisions I make and the strength of the programs I plan. Now I must find ways to work within my institution and with the communities when the needs of all are not always compatible.

The stories I tell now are becoming of a kind that has recognizable characters and plots: How do I enact my own will and agency in this context of competing and conflicting forces? And how do I do this in a way that preserves all that I feel is crucial to my self-definition as an adult educator, a woman who cares about her work and worries about doing it well? The plot, as they say, thickens.

Reflections on My Story – June 1999

This is not the first time I had written about my early experiences of coming to the Northwest Territories. My memories of Wha ti are all positive, but it occurs to me lately that I have left some important information out, and it is true that after Wha ti, I taught in three more communities and had very different experiences, not always so straightforwardly (and a little nostalgically) positive. I ask myself whether my days in Wha ti were really ones of political and social innocence or whether the experience offered me something personally fulfilling so that my innocence was deliberately maintained.

The adult education class was in the home economics room of the school where every morning, several women Elders from the community made a hot breakfast of caribou stew for the children. We started the class later in the morning because of that activity, and I can remember the Elders, as they cleaned up, bemused and smiling as I drilled students in verb tenses.

Because the class started at 11:00, I had extra time in the morning, so I would stop at the Nurses Station to have coffee with "The Nurse." People in the community knew we did this routinely, so if students needed me before class, they always knew where to find me. There was only one nurse in the community as there was only one Adult Educator, so in a very real sense, this was my first experience of having an established role in a community for which there were no competitors, and about which there was no confusion even if my own understanding of my role became more problematic, especially in subsequent community postings. Wha ti offered me the entirely seductive experience of being constituted by an important role (as I saw it), where I was seen to have knowledge and skills that I could offer young adults, skills that no one else in the community had.

The manner in which I present my experience is one of exploration and adventure, and in that way echoes other stories of Northern exploration, albeit a little more self-consciously, where I am the subject of the story and name the features of the life in terms that establish me as the central figure. Who was this experience isolating for? My choice of language – sea legs, isolation, adventure, "going North" - seems to me to be steeped in colonial language, which described conquering the rugged frontier.

I enjoyed the role of Northern heroine in those early years, but the way I chose to tell those stories to my admiring listeners was from the narrative stance of an "adventurer." This choice of plot meant I came to know the North in certain ways but not in others. Now, when I tell the story of my work with Aboriginal people and talk about their narratives, for example, with respect to residential school experiences, the reception can be very different. I cannot talk about these stories in the same, unproblematic fashion. Residential school experiences have far wider interpretive implications and possibilities than do stories about bears or personal triumph in hard conditions. The focus is no longer on me, the narrator of others' experiences, but on the context of the story. And depending on the listener, the reception to these kinds of difficult or painful experiences involves a far wider range of audience responses.

Coming to the question

My interest in this research arose from my own experiences in the North; experiences I believed would resonate amongst other women in similar positions and with similar responsibilities. I have been a part of these experiences with other women as we shared work on particular projects or attended the same meetings. Over the last few years, women I know personally and professionally have shared many of their stories of their working lives, and it was my remembering of these conversations confirmed my research interest. This research was an opportunity to ask to hear those stories again, and to hear them with renewed interest. I wanted to explore whether they would share some of these same story-telling complexities that I have experienced. Originally my focus was on such questions as: How would they describe their work as administrators and educators in the North? What stories would they choose to tell? What made them uneasy about their work in this context in particular, and how did they work with this unease? What aspects of their work have gone well for them and what accounts for those feelings of success and accomplishment? Most of all, though, I wanted to ask if they felt the same desire for a sense of congruency in their narratives, the sense that what they believed to be true about themselves and their working lives was reflected back to them in their work environments. I had sometimes found that personal congruency difficult, and I wanted to see if other women felt the same way.

As Hartman (1991) states, "We construct our selves as agents by piecing together our telling stories, by *emplotting* the events of our lives (to use Hayden White's term) in narratives that have explanatory power (emphasis in original)" (p. 12). "We are, to be sure," she says, "discursively constrained as we live, interpret, and emplot our stories…" but Hartman wants to make a strong case for agency in the way that we make sense of our lives by "embodying our stories through narrative" (p. 12). We use the materials at hand for constructing stories, but we also choose among our materials, keeping some and scrapping others. If we give up this project of deliberately constructing and re-constructing our lives through stories, Hartman believes, "we disperse ourselves wantonly." McLaren (1993) also believes that we work with narratives intentionally: "we use different kinds of narratives to tell different kinds of stories, but we also sanction certain narratives and discount others for ideological and political reasons" (p. 203).

In this project, then, I talk about my understanding of the fragmentation and coherence of our narratives as we emplot stories of our working lives in the North, but also how the narratives of our choosing and the categorizations they offer frame our moral relations and epistemic categories with others in a particular context.

The process of the research shaped these research interests, itself. As the interviews progressed, I began to feel an increasing unease. While the questions I initially focused on, dissonance and congruency in stories about work (I had not yet, at this stage, begun to understand this project in terms of discourses and agency), still held interest as I transcribed the tapes, I began to worry about my apparent preoccupation with how the women experienced their working lives without adequate reference to the context within which those working lives were enacted. In the following example, community work is mentioned only once and towards the end of the interview, this despite the fact that this organization is committed to community work as part of its mandate:

> (We are talking about roles and titles in the participant's organization and what is involved in her new administrative role, which has much more responsibility than her last one.)
> K: So it came up briefly again (different titles for essentially similar roles) and I think again I said to the employee, something was going to be done, but it's true, isn't it? It's crazy. And with this (her role) is also the communities. Well of course there's not much there (in the communities), but maybe it's a vicious circle. There's not much in the communities because I'm doing both? And the other issue is Igloolik and Igloolik wants to do their own thing. So it's that kind of vicious circle. But that's one thing I want to do is go out more to Igloolik.

I: That's a really interesting community to build a relationship with. They're doing interesting stuff – like integrating the adult back into high school. John…
K: Did you hear he's leaving?
I: No. Where's he going? Home?

This was the extent of our conversation on community work – we were easily sidetracked by "gossip," sharing our informal knowledge of people and places in the North. It was sidebars such as this that, during my readings of the interviews, led me to reflect on my research interests.

I had set out to ask for stories about work, anticipating I would hear stories that took place primarily in two settings, "home" organizations and communities where we worked, but did not live. However, stories that described work in Aboriginal communities were not always showing up. Why? This was due, in part, to the questions I asked which invited certain responses and foreclosed others. But the stories seemed to be for the most part, focused inwardly. Were these stories really so self-contained? What purpose do stories serve (or could serve) other than some sense of continuity, looking backwards and forwards in a life? To what extent should our story telling be self-critical about our historical place? And whose job was that? Mine? The respondents? I experienced, at times, feelings of disappointment, which felt inappropriate but were there nonetheless. What right did I have to judge the merit of particular stories? Did I have expectations about these women that were not being borne out? The questions and feelings of ambivalence around the research process that began to accumulate gave rise to my thinking more about narratives as a potentially useful frame for understanding my own story in relation to the moral responsibilities inherent in my work in the North. I'm establishing, prima facie, the necessity of having moral responsibilities in this way.

Purpose of the Research

In their contribution to the book entitled, "Gendering Organizational Analysis" (1992), [Tancred-]Sheriff and Campbell trace the historical contributions of women to research on women in organizations and go on to discuss the categories of both researcher and research that have seemed the most amenable to the contributions of women. In these sections, they discuss how women researchers have often been relegated to the role of "service workers" (p. 34), "tidying" up research by others, usually men, pulling together others' hypotheses and constructing their own for others to test. These authors see this role as unsurprising as it "parallels their typical work in the home" (p. 35). Further, the researchers found that the dominant theme for this work was the treatment of power and its distribution and particularly a focus on how women in organizations cope with the issues that are based in power relations. This, they continued, has tended to direct women researchers' attention to issues of oppression and how subordinate social groups employ a variety of strategies that compensate for their lack of direct access to or control over the sources of power. The authors characterize this as the "view from the bottom" and once again, find this view unremarkable given its entrenchment in the ideological and structural position of women in general. This view tends to focus on issues of power, taking power as a given and focusing on its distribution rather than on the processes that concentrate or legitimate power in particular places (p. 39).

As I conceptualized this research and began the process of interviewing, my intent was and continues to be to some extent, informed by this “view from the bottom.” However, I did not assume the bottom could only yield indirect ways of confronting power. The “view from the bottom” also implies, for research on women in organizations, a view that has not been taken up at the top and so this research adds to the growing body of literature that describes women’s experiences of organizational life, research that has been important in its challenge to the traditional knowledge base in educational administration. This knowledge base has been seen to be constructed and carefully guarded by a privileged group of theorists and practitioners who have not, by and large, paid much attention to the stories of race and gender in the field; that is the knowledge base about practice and theory which has come from the perspective of white males operating in the public sphere (Hearn & Parkin, 1992; Scheurich, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1995; [Tancred-]Sheriff & Campbell, 1992; Young, 1994).

My research interest also grew out of my own growing discomfort with my first story-telling experiences, first as a Northern “adventurer,” and subsequently how these tales of adventure with myself as the central hardy protagonist, failed to capture the ambiguities and interests of my role as a white women administrator. Further, these stories also failed to capture the essence of what made educational work in the North work of a morally significant kind in its potential to impact the lives of students who did not have access to the same kinds of resources, financially and educationally, as I did.

I have understood these story-telling complexities to be related to two analytical strands. One concerns the act of narration as the site at which we (re)construct and reveal our self/identity (Dyer & Keller-Cohen, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Hardin, 1991). This construction, however, is a relational project in terms not only of the characters in our narratives but also of the imagined audience of our stories. Embedded within these internal and external narrative worlds are negotiations, choices and kinds of engagements with others. Underpinning all are the features of the discursive context revealing both the structures of identity of the narrator and the discursive structures of the context. Context, discourse, narrative choice, discursive constraints are all part of the fabric of a storytelling event, and I believe that while making our experience visible through language is concerned with making our selves visible, it is also a different project, making ourselves visible in particular ways, to particular others. It is important to note again that the content of stories does not make visible, directly and unproblematically, the experience and only that of the narrator[iii]. We use stories for different analytical purposes. An interview is full of hesitations, re-wordings, pauses for reflection and sentences trailing away. All of these are windows as well, into how our narratives can be fragmented and discontinuous.

The purpose of this research, then, became more than the collection of stories from women administrators in the interest of expanding the knowledge base of educational administration, although the research will have achieved this goal as well. The purpose is also to examine the nature of organizational discourses in relation to women administrators' work, and to describe strategies women employ, working within these discourses as well as at the juncture of competing discourses. These strategies, as I saw them articulated in their stories, lead to a discussion about how discourses both constrain our actions and open up spaces for negotiation of our working selves. The negotiations around the spaces that competing discourses open up is the opportunity, as I saw it, to define our agency and this research looks at the possibility of a definition of agency in a post-structuralist analytic context, which does not depend on a unified and coherent self, but is developed through narratives that describe ourselves in relation to others in a moral and ethical working landscape. Could such a concept of agency be defended in post-structuralist terms? Part of that answer lay in examining, through the research stories, the power of discourses to shape our self-understandings. Several concepts are important to this work and are defined in successive chapters, including a discussion of post-structuralist research and the terms "discourse" and "agency," as well as the nature of subjectivity in a post-structuralist paradigm.

[iii] A fuller discussion of the concept of "experience" and its uses in research appear in Chapter Two: Administration as Ethical Engagement.

Structure of the Thesis

In chapter two, I describe my research methods and provide a more detailed description of the idea of discourse as I understand it and use it in this research. In chapter three, I continue with the discussion on the ethical dimensions of our work, and vis a vis a post-structuralist account of agency, think critically about the glue that binds disjointed narratives together. I refine the concepts of agency, narrative and storytelling and begin the development of the idea of agency as a particular kind of engagement with those in our working lives. I draw primarily on Walker's (1998) framework of relational ethics to argue for an understanding of different types of narratives, relationally defined, as providing coherence to our lives, and I also point to the idea of multiple narratives, stories we tell to ourselves and to others, of our moral commitments and relationships.

In chapter four, I analyze stories of travel in relation to Campbell's (1999) work on unearned privilege to explore a concept of agency that requires conscious engagement in our relationships. Here I begin the development of the idea of agency, not as a kind of triumph over context nor as an achievement of an autonomous self, but as ethical engagement following both Hartman's (1991) views on our ability to choose our plots and Walker's (1998) frame around what those choices may involve. This question of what constitutes narrative choice for women continues to dodge both the ideas of agency and deliberate narrative construction.

Chapter five looks at organizational discourse specifically, and the truth effects of this discourse that both buttress women's action within it and stand oppositionally to their actions outside of it. Maintaining my earlier version of narrative choice, I look at the extent of that choice within discursive constraints that operate daily through organizational practice and policy at different levels of awareness. When women exercise strategic resistance to discourse, how does that change their role as a shaping agent within that discourse and in turn, how are woman shaped?

These ideas around conscious engagement, agency in relation to others and discursive resistance all point to a problematic in regards to what can be said about the stability of a self or the possibility of multiple selves. Agency of the kind I am suggesting may seem to indicate an internal unwavering source, a return to the idea of a coherent and rational self. Hardin (2000) frames this question as "locating agency between free will and discursive marionettes" (p.11), and while I am uneasy with the metaphor of the continuum and particularly the extremes that form its endpoints, I do take Hardin to be addressing similar issues. The act of choosing and positioning implies a subject position that moves within the narrative as in the daily practice of administration. What impact that has on the post-structuralist idea of multiple selves is a question that is threaded through this research and taken up more specifically in chapter six.

CHAPTER TWO: ADMINISTRATION, DISCOURSE AND POST STRUCTURALISM

In this chapter I provide a more complete description of the research process undertaken in this research. I begin with a discussion of the concept of "discourse," and then turn to a description of the women whose stories are told in this work along with the research methodology. I then move to a discussion around the challenges and opportunities in working with a post-structuralist/feminist methodology and conclude with a discussion of trustworthiness in this research paradigm

Discourse

In this section, I hope to accomplish two things: provide a description of the term "discourse" as I understand it and use it in this thesis and to sketch at this stage, theoretical considerations around the notion of discourse and the attendant ideas of subjectivity and agency that I will fill in more fully throughout the remaining chapters.

To start with a definition borrowed from Hardin (2000), discourses are "broad social, cultural and historical systems of meanings, creating both the notion of 'self' and how the 'self' constructs the world" (p.14). Discourses organize our understanding of the world and our experience, and through this organization, establish power and knowledge effects. We do not exist pre-discursively, we learn what it means to say "I" through the discourses that are circulated around us, and from which we draw the language to describe our experience and ourselves.

Because there are multiple and competing discourses with varying degrees of legitimacy in use at any one time, there exists the possibility for describing and experiencing our subjectivity in different ways. Discourses "compete" for our allegiance (Weedon, 1987), but not in the way that we are always conscious of, or if we are, that make the idea of choice always relevant. Because discourses embed power relations through the establishment of what counts as "meaningful or truthful statements" (Flax, 1992, p. 452), we may find ourselves at the juncture of conflicting discourses through different life experiences or roles. Weedon (1987) uses the example of the discourse of motherhood to illustrate this disjuncture, and describes how it is possible that the new mother may become aware that feelings of inadequacy and failure are common, and that childcare is a social rather than a natural arrangement. As well, women who are "inserted" (Weedon, 1987) into the discourse of motherhood may also find this position in conflict with other subject positions women have been encouraged to take up. This sense of disjuncture offers the new mother a new subject position "from which to make sense of her situation" (p. 34), but she is also '*subjected*' to the contradictions of the competing discourses and makes sense of them or adapts new subject positions at "great emotional cost" (p. 34, emphasis in original). In this thesis women, employing various strategies, do work with the rupture of competing narratives but as Weedon suggests, do so at some risk.

As Flax explains, "each discourse or 'discursive formation' is simultaneously enabling and limiting. The rules of discourse enable us to make certain sorts of statements and to make truth claims, but the same rules force us to remain within the system and to make only those statements that conform to these rules" (p. 452). In principle, because we live with multiple discourses, it should be possible to be open to all forms of subjectivity, assuming that we recognize the discourses that constrain and enable us, and the alternatives available to us (Weedon, 1987). However, some subject positions are foreclosed to us, depending on the particular rules and constructions of the discourse and the basis for exclusion. One woman in this thesis talks about the rules of dress which some of her male colleagues seem disinclined to observe but make clear, nonetheless, that part of her legitimacy as a woman in a management position depends on her dressing in certain ways. She is faced with the decision to comply with that rule or to resist that placement of her and in the end complies; saving her energies for other exclusionary battles she must fight to gain access to the discourse. It is, however, at this juncture of discourses and the sense of other subject positions being possible, which reveals the opportunity for transforming power relations (Weedon, 1987).

Hutcheon (1988) notes that the use of the term "discourse" operates in current post-structuralist theory as a kind of "flag" that signifies whatever is under discussion is not going to be analyzed independently of its "political and ideological address" (p. 184). Because discourse operates through the rules and norms that govern a historically specific way of being -- thinking and acting -- in the world, a dominant discourse necessarily represses other discourses, which rise, nonetheless, and cause rupture and fragmentation. Discourse is expressed through language and what post-structuralism has done, on one front, is to restore the political nature of the “act of enunciation” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 184). That is, the very act of speaking has been re-politized as the focus has turned to the conditions which give rise to the act as well as the content of the language. An attention to discourse, Hutcheon says, “will not let us ignore social practices, the historical conditions of meaning and the positions from which texts are produced and received" (p. 184). This definition of discourse supports the idea that experience and stories are neither transparent nor representational (Razack 1993; Scott 1992). Because they are embedded in a discursive construction, their elucidation surfaces the rules and norms that govern their telling.

However, the challenge to dominant discourses and the resulting ruptures contribute to and maintain the dynamism of a discourse as well as giving rise to new ones (Knight and Morgan, 1991). In this way, discourse also inscribes the ways in which we accomplish "social relations," by participating in reproducing a discourse's truth effects even though we could always do "otherwise" (p. 254). Discourses also act internally upon us, structuring our subjectivity and playing out truth-power dynamics through our physical and social beings. While it is possible, then, to resist discursive constraints, Knight and Morgan (1991) suggest that discourse also operates on the level of subjectivity and constitutes us as subjects because the discourse embeds our own self-understandings. We never speak outside discourse, but we do recognize the spaces it creates (or forecloses) when we try to do otherwise. (Flax, 1992; Jones, 1993; Scott, 1992; Weedon, 1987)

This sense of discourse problematizes the subject, or in post-structuralist terms, "de-centers" it (Craib, 1992), by acknowledging and foregrounding the conditions, which support or suppress particular enunciative acts. As Jones (1993) argues, though, and as Weedon (1987) and Hartman (1991) agree, discourses do not speak through us to the extent that we are merely operating under an illusion of narrative choice. In Craib's (1992) words, "the subject refuses to lie down" (p.180), but in what ways, then, is she left standing?

The answer to this question is not just of epistemological interest. If we are discursively constructed in this way, how is it we can we be said to be in acting in this world with a sense of agency? As Butler notes (1992), "just now, when women are beginning to assume the place of subjects, postmodern positions come along to announce that the subject is dead" (p. 14).[iv] However, Butler argues that to politicize the subject is not to do away with it entirely, but to consider the "linguistic functions it serves in the consolidation and concealment of authority" (p. 15). Butler further argues that it is just this resignification of the term "woman" that may allow us to rethink a concept of agency or even to consider agency as possible. If the term woman (as a subject position) continues to be a particular kind of referent, it closes the possibility of new meanings and traps that position forever it its historical (including racist and maternal) "ontologies" (p. 16).

The idea of "agency," then, has been worked with extensively by feminist/post-structuralist researchers in different ways. Bronwyn Davies (2000) rejects the argument that any appearance of the idea of agency in research suggests that the theory stands outside of post-structuralism, even as she acknowledges the difficult nature of subjectivity which, she says, allows us to become 'agentic, speaking subjects' while at the same time realizing that this ability depends on successful subjection in discourses that make our speech meaningful (p. 2). Her work focuses on how children take up the discourse of acceptable school behavior and what the consequences are for those children who "escape" this subjection. Hardin's (2000) interest is in medical discourses. She examines how individual stories of health are tied to available "social and available discourses in circulation," but how within these broad discursive parameters, patients negotiate within the subject positions available to them and position themselves in certain ways intentionally. Baxter (2002), Jones (1993), Walkerdine (1990) focus on the ways girls actively take up subject positions within discourses (while acknowledging, again, the limits placed by discourses in use).

[iv] Butler (1992) notes, "there is a difference between positions of poststructuralism which claim that the subject never existed, and postmodern positions which claim that the subject *once* had integrity, but no longer does" (p. 14).

The possibility remains open, then, for a description of agency that is not necessarily tied to a modernist notion of the self which is "coherent and fixed" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32), but is politized and deconstructed to open up the meaning, like the meaning of the self, to other interpretations and possibilities. My analysis of the stories in this research attempts to see what possibilities for agency exist within the confines and opportunities of the discourses that shape women administrators' subjectivities.

Post-Structuralist Methodology

This research, conducted using a feminist, post-structuralist methodology attempts to reconcile (for the purposes of this research, not the entire debate) the points of departure between post-structuralism and feminism. I use both theoretical positions, or more accurately, combine both in a positive project of discourse analysis. Discourse analysis, the primary technique employed by post-structuralist theorists, involves the opening of texts for new and different interpretations, rather than reading them as direct evidence of one's "thoughts" (Francis, 1999). In this research, the text is comprised of interview data, and remembered conversations and events. The text also includes many of my own stories of experience as a woman administrator. In this section I detail, more fully, how I collected stories, how I engaged with post-structuralist discourse analysis, and some of the concerns feminists and researchers have articulated with respect to combining post-structuralism and feminism.

For this research, I chose to interview women who shared common features, both in their working context and in their positions in the North. They were program administrators in education with responsibility for program and policy implementation. They also had administrative accountability to managers who were placed hierarchically above them, and all worked within institutions found in the Northwest Territories. They were women who had come to work in the North but were not Aboriginal and had not been born there. I have worked with all of the women in this research, to a lesser or greater extent, on joint projects or programs in the N.W.T. This meant that I was familiar with their backgrounds and histories and their work environment, and this knowledge, while having its own inherent research cautions provided a rich background to our conversations.

I chose participants who worked in the field of education and who also worked in cross-cultural settings as this work in education holds particular interest for me. This is my professional field, as well, and a context with which I have a great deal of familiarity. That meant as I interviewed, I was able to focus on the conversations without becoming overly preoccupied with unfamiliar details of the context.

I invited these women to share conversations with me about their working lives through unstructured interviews that were recorded as well as through unrecorded conversations. I asked them to tell me stories of their organizational lives, but I also asked them specifically about their work in Aboriginal communities; all of them either worked directly with Aboriginal communities or were involved with policy or program decisions that had direct impact. These two settings, the office and travel to communities, held the most potential for calling forth experiences, which spoke to cross-cultural work, administrative authority and gendered relations. I relied on the standard tool for collecting interviews, taped conversations and transcriptions, but stories did not always obligingly appear when I was in a formal interview context. I also used recollections of conversations that had taken place over time and in different settings.

The participants all had a letter outlining the research intent and during the interviews, I also shared stories of my own to give them a sense of the kinds of stories I was interested in collecting. My own stories, (like all stories) contain both the particular and the universal, so they provided at least some sense of plot, character and place for us with which to begin (Chase, 1995). But because I was both subject and object of my own research, and because I invited the participants to share interpretive responsibility with me in a way that made them both subject and object too, I want to talk specifically about how that complicated, but also added interest, to the research.

As I noted earlier in the discussion around Scott (1992) and experience, experiences, particularly as they are presented through personal stories, cannot be taken as "brute data," transparent in their meaning. As an audience and eventually, the interpreter of this text, I entered the narrative of the participants' lives at a point in the re-construction of their stories as they recalled stories that were formed in some previous interpretative context. I was, at a minimum, a second interpretative community for the stories, but there was yet another behind me - my committee, the university - all of which affected what I could conclude about the original narrative strategy in its original narrative context. That is, of course, a general methodological consideration when asking other people to recall their experiences and belongs to a range of considerations around how researcher, participant and context implicate each other. It is insufficient to flag these considerations for their interest sake only, though, as they get to the heart of the ethics of the research.

My familiarity and friendship with some of the women became a central question during my candidacy, as a result of a question a committee member asked me about my relationship to the participants. I told the committee about one woman who had been so important to me in my early days as an administrator, who had, with care and respect, mentored me with her vast knowledge of the system and her "smarts" about the vagaries of organizational behaviour. When she spoke to me about participating, her worry over doing right by the research and me surfaced repeatedly. She also had a disappointing experience in a Master's program, and so envisioned what *my* interpretive community might be like and what sort of demands they would make of me. She wanted me to succeed and so the stories she told, and most importantly, the strategies she used, I think, were also formed by her understandings of her relationship to me and the narrative unity of our lives as friends and colleagues. Some feminist researchers believe that this potent combination of mutual care and an "epistemology of insiderness (the personal connection to the topic)" renders the research context too ethically and morally ambivalent to justify this kind of familiarity with the participants (Rheinharz, 1992).

However, every narrative researcher needs to recognize the frame and agenda of her research, whether or not explicitly communicated to the participants, as this may easily result in the stories having a kind of coherence that has the deceptive appearance of a “common sense,” shared among the participants and the researcher. My own interpretative stance was to try and attend to the particularities of the stories, adopting Thomas's (1992-3) version of "moral deference”; to bear witness to someone's account of his or her life in a way that does not dismiss that account whether or not it resonates with your own perspective. This was particularly important for this project, as my own stories both gave rise to the project and continue to play an explanatory and contextual role for me. An attitude of moral deference is also, Thomas says, to "render salient what was salient for her in the way that was salient for her; that one will represent her struggle to cope in the ways that she has been in getting on with in her life . . ." (p. 245). The idea of moral deference is consonant with the discarded notion that our longed for dreams of an innocent research life (Flax, 1992) can be realized if "there is a vantage point from which any and every person can rationally grasp whatever morally significant experiences a person might have" (Thomas, p. 233).

Without any attempt at interpretation or analysis, researchers may end up simply reproducing the barriers to voice in a different form, however, and stories of experience become both de-politized and de-contextualized (Fine, 1991; Tierney,1993). The theory that emerges must be "grounded in a body of empirical work that is ceaselessly confronted with and respectful of the experiences of people in their daily life" (Lather, p. 1986, p. 251), even as that daily life is always experienced at the confluence of a discursive and material world. Although I have used my own stories extensively, I have not been preoccupied with my own role as researcher; a preoccupation that Lincoln and Denzin (1994) as well as Patai (1995) believe is excessive and threatens to outstrip concern over actual research accomplishments. In Patai's (1994) and Chase's (1995) experience, however, no matter how much we worry about our role, the narrators have an agenda of their own which they return to time and again, despite any efforts to steer them in another direction.

Challenges Within a Post-Structuralist/Feminist Methodology

Discourse analysis has been seen to be problematic, particularly when employed by feminist researchers. The problems are two-fold: a proliferation of methods, all said to be discourse analysis without proper attention to the meaning of this term, nor a delineation of what the term stands for in constructing theory (Bacchi, 2000; Ball & Hodgson, 2001). The second problem is to what extent feminism and post-structuralism can be said to have compatible research programs. [v]

For the purposes of this research, I will take the position that the goals of feminist research, very broadly stated to be emancipatory, need not necessarily be at odds with post-structuralism. I agree with Baxter (2002) who in defence of a feminist post-structuralist method says:

> Such inquiry has an interest in the free play of multiple discourses within given social contexts, which means that voices of minority or oppressed groups *need* to be heard clearly alongside those of more dominant groups. Mainstream discourses aim univocally to silence, suppress, displace and overturn the interplay of alternative or oppositional voices. The post-structuralist 'quest'--and I use that word advisedly--is to create spaces to allow the voice of marginalised groups, such as women, the disabled or the gay community to be heard with ringing clarity. (p. 9, emphasis in original)

It is my understanding that part of the debate concerns the nature of commitment to research ends which can be said to improve the lives of women or at least, are understanding of the structures under which they labour. Because no essentialist epistemological category can be privileged over another, including gender, post-structuralism undermines the feminist agenda. The feminist field has been reflexive on its own account about the privileging of particular theorising positions, and does not need post-structuralists to point out the partial understandings these positions confer. However, where my particular research interest intersects the debate is over whether post-structuralists can work with the idea of 'agency' without calling forth modernist assumptions with respect to the individual subject (Alcoff, 1988; Jones, 1997).

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[v] For a through discussion of points of view in the latter debate, see Linda J. Nicholson (1990) *Feminism/Postmodernism*, New York: Routledge.

Given my interest in establishing a sense of agency within post-structuralist discourse analysis, but wary of "wanting to have my cake and eat it too" (Jones, 1997; Morwenna, 1995), I would argue here, along with Davies (1992), Marchmant and Parpart (1995) and Fraser and Nicholson (1990), that post-structuralism and feminism both offer critical engagements with the ideas of foundational epistemes, and particularly the idea of fluid subjectivities, understood as constructions of historical, spatial and particularly in this research, institutional contexts (Marchmant and Parpart, 1995). I also do not believe that engaging in feminist, post-structuralist research necessarily entails that the researcher be uncritically engaged in the discourse of research itself. In other words, it is possible to understand, and post-structuralist inquiry demands this in part, that the use of any particular research paradigm will itself, be a constructed and positioned understanding within the researcher's own context. In the end, I believe Fraser and Nicholson summarize the merits of this debate when they encourage its continuance in the search for a "broader, richer, more complex and multi-layered feminist solidarity, the sort of solidarity which is essential for overcoming the oppression of women in its "endless variety and monotonous similarity" (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990, p. 35).

Interpretation from a post-structuralist perspective has meant that the analysis took different interpretative paths, depending on what the re-reading of the interviews conversations surfaced for me at particular stages of the writing. The reflective pieces, marked by indented, italicised headings, were stages of the writing in which a return to the text yielded up new considerations and constructions. I have marked them off and included them in this way because rather than edit earlier analyses, I wanted to show that the task of discourse analysis involves seeing constructions differently and from different angles when the original text is reconsidered: "The aim of deconstructionist reading is to illustrate that all text, when 'read' from a deconstructionist perspective, is never 'fixed' and always open to multiple interpretations" (Hardin, 2000, p. 14). I also kept both original writing and reflections on that writing in the interest of trustworthiness, which I discuss in the next section.

Trustworthiness in Narrative Inquiry

Stories as research data are an attractive problem open to endless interpretation, nesting one within the other, equal parts opaque and transparent. Moreover, as I have meant to demonstrate, there is meaning both in the content of the story and the way it is told. With all the possible interpretations available, how is it possible to defend the one that you present to your audience and to avoid what Lather (1986), call "rampant subjectivity where one finds only what one is predisposed to look for, which is just as bad, in her view, as the "pointless precision" of hyper-objectivity (p. 259).

As Lather (1994) remarks validity in structuralist terms used to be about "epistemological guarantees" (p. 38) where to satisfy questions of validity, we as researchers needed to show that we had represented the phenomenon as it truly was, not as we wanted to believe it should be. Validity in post-structuralism takes a different tack, re-framing it as a theoretical problem rather than a technical problem, the latter having always been partially satisfactory at best (Lather, p. 39).

This is a particularly interesting problem for this kind of research. When we tell stories we change the facts, misrepresent some, engage in hyperbole and generally never tell the same story twice (Personal Narratives Group, 1989). The truth of the story is not in the unalterable facts, but in the experiences. Baudrillard's term for this is "simulacra," copies with no originals (cited in Lather, 1994, p. 40). The text becomes stripped of its authority as representative of the truth, and now must be taken on its own merits (Lincoln and Denzin, 1994). In Lincoln and Denzin's (1994) view, a good text invokes a commitment to question how power and ideology operate through discourse" (p. 579).

I found "simulacra" a very useful term for this research. I cannot look to the original story in its original interpretative context to see how faithfully my "copy" corresponds. It has not been a question of how well I have represented facts, but how well I have represented the complex web of meanings and practices that have given rise to the representation (Chase, 1995).

Post-structuralist inquiry can be evaluated for trustworthiness on several fronts. A good starting point in evaluating the text is in terms of its literary merits (Tierney, 1994). A "good read" is one that draws the reader in by referencing familiar characters and plots in the reader's own life. It must also carry a strong sense of verisimilitude; the idea that what is being described is possible and close to the reality of the reader. As I have discussed elsewhere, the text also mediates among the particular lives of the participants and the social world of the reader. The mediation between these two worlds, the text and the reader, gives readers the sense of having glimpsed experiences, which are evocative of our own lives in some essential way.

Conclusion

I have used a post-structuralist, feminist approach to the analysis of this research which involved two intertwined research strategies: using discourse analysis to open the text of the interviews and remembered conversations in order to discover, problematize and theorise issues of subjectivity and agency which are central to our understanding, in this research, of how women recognise and engage with the discourses of their organisations and communities, the latter meant to include communities of work and the broader meaning of social communities. I initially conceived the analysis of this research in an interpretive paradigm, but this approach did not adequately address the theoretical interest of post-structuralist theory with respect to women and agency, and the evolving centrality of notions of the self and agency in coming to an understanding of how women understand and use discursive strategies in their working lives. In using post-structuralist theory and feminism in this way, I have hoped to make a contribution to the emancipatory project of uncovering the various practices of power-discourse that operate within Northern institutions and communities and women administrators' potential responses to those moral engagements.

CHAPTER THREE: ADMINISTRATION AS ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT

Working in educational institutions involves a fair amount of what one woman in the research called "fluff," constructing policies or strategies which seem pointless (her example was being asked to write a literacy strategy for fishermen). I have been involved in numerous strategic planning exercises, and I admit to a certain casualness about them sometimes. The college produced so many documents of this nature, many of which were never "operationalized," as we were fond of saying. There is expediency to this work that is troubling at times.

One such example for me was the requirement to incorporate a strategic plan for traditional knowledge within my division's plans when I was Director of Community Programs. This was a government directive, flowing from the Deputy Minister, after he had sanctioned the coming together of a "Traditional Knowledge Working Group" comprising Elders, policy people from all departments in the government, non-government organizations, and so on. College staff members attended a workshop on traditional knowledge and then were sent off to produce plans for incorporation.

There were various reactions to this by staff. Many, like myself, were still grappling with the meaning of "traditional knowledge" (I remembered a traditional knowledge weekend I had arranged for students in one community where I was the only one left in camp, clumsily learning to clean muskrats with an exasperated Elder, while my students rode back and forth between the community and Yellowknife, getting haircuts and picking up their math books). Others categorized it as one more politically expedient task and dismissed the whole thing. I wrote a traditional knowledge plan for Community Programs in an hour or two, scrambling towards a deadline, which became a *model* for all other departments! At the time, I accepted the accolades and forgot about the whole thing. One of the women in this research spoke at length about these demands, and how much they used to frustrate her. But now she sees them as opportunities to hone other skills like becoming a better writer, and learning to "play" with the directives that are meaningless.

There are ethical dimensions to this work, though. Traditional Knowledge is still a requirement and my plan included important ideas that the College struggles with still, affirmative action, for example. I lost the connection, at the time, between my work and the impact that work is meant to have on students in the communities. Our work should not be merely "play;" although that may make it palatable, it does not make it ethical.

Educational work in the Northwest Territories, especially, has a strong ethical requirement as it involves working with a population which is struggling against colonial histories, is characterized by high unemployment and illiteracy rates, and, for the most part, is shut out of the highest paying occupations and their concomitant privileged social status. In this way, none of what we do is "fluff," however it may seem like such. Our clients are those to whom we are obligated to respond simply because we have the resources to do so, and we are ethically bound, by their dependence on those resources, to consider these obligations as one of the many relational moral arrangements we have professionally. The clients of our policies and strategies can reasonably expect this response from us.

What does this response look like, however, and what are the boundaries of our responsibilities to others as women administrators? Why is this a question at all for this research? In this Chapter, I explore two related concepts that form a theoretical backdrop for the subsequent Chapters, drawing primarily on the work of Margaret Walker (1998) and her account of an ethics of responsibility. As well, I provide a theoretical background to the idea of stories in narrative inquiry. I am exploring these concepts for two reasons: As I worked with the research interviews, it became apparent that some of the reflection on the purpose of the research and my own re-reading of my initial stories of the North seemed to be unanchored. What was missing was a backdrop to the conversations that provided connections between the stories and the context in which those stories were enacted and also in which they were told. We were talking about work, but work in a specific context and without the connection to the context present in the analysis of these conversations, the transcripts seemed to float above the working landscape.

Because, my interests also included the construction of subjectivities and the question around how women experienced and described a working self, the intersection of analysis with the social, political and personal themes was all the more important. If it were true that subjectivity shifted in response to the constraints of dominant, particularly organizational, discourses, and reactions against these discourses, the analysis needed to take into account other features of the story-telling context. While the story of the Band Managers' meeting, told in the prologue, for example, provides the opportunity for me to analyze my working experiences and what that meant to the construction of myself as a woman administrator in a new job, the telling of it also needs to be connected to the other characters in the story and their placement in my story, historically, politically and socially. Without these connections, while the story may provide endless opportunities for revision and reflection, the potential for it to uncover other concepts of significance is diminished.

Finally, in a theme I return to in subsequent chapters, the stories are not just about personal lives. As Butler (1990) points out, "the feminist claim that the personal is political suggests, in part, that subjective experience is not only structured by existing political arrangements, but effects and structures those arrangements in turn" (p. 273). The act of asking one to describe their lived experience privileges the voice of the subject, but does not limit our understanding to that subjective experience. Reconnecting the stories with the context leave the integrity of the storyteller's authority intact but accommodates the wider political arena (Butler, 1990).

An Ethical Frame for Storytelling

Walker (1998) has shaped a model that addresses the challenges presented by the kinds and types of moral responses we have to others and the connection of those responses to issues of agency. She attempts in her book, "Moral Understandings," to develop a model that acknowledges our responsibilities, that accommodate "the richness and diversity of what people have reasons to care about and take responsibility for, while respecting the varieties and vagaries of the very different lives people may want to, or have to, lead." She does this through development of what she terms, an "expressive-collaborative" model; we are continually engaged with others in the negotiation of responsibilities and moral understandings that shape these engagements and are best understood as expressed to ourselves and others in narrative. These narratives keep our moral lives "coherent and sustainable" (p. 63).

It is not enough, in her view, to talk about moral obligations in terms of being able to respond to others' vulnerabilities and to be obligated to do so by virtue of a particular relationship or some kind of resource. Walker uses the example of parenting to make this point. Our children have vulnerabilities that we must respond to as their primary caregivers. But the nature of that response and even how those vulnerabilities are defined are not immediately obvious and can be quite different given, for example, different cultural vantage points from which to understand the social values and expectations of parenting. We need to respond to the basic needs of our children, but what of the other needs they have for psychological safety or personal growth? How are these vulnerabilities defined and what defines the limit of what an adequate response is?

My own adopted daughter, Jesse, is from an Inuit culture and the story told about her by others is one of rescue. I resist this story because I know her needs would likely have been met by her birth parents; I have enough evidence from my experience in the North to reasonably hold this view. Others, though, clearly believe the advantages I can give her in terms of spacious homes, a commitment to formal education, a wider experience with the world, gymnastic classes and swimming lessons are the responses she needs and would not have had. Walker notes,

> Socially accepted thresholds of adequate capability may be meager or rather robust. These thresholds are often not uniform even within a society and may vary with parents' (or others') ability, interest, and resources or with passing social and political agendas and the limits on variation may not be well or consistently defined. (p. 88)

While the story about Jesse in the south is "rescue," the general feeling amongst my Northern acquaintances was that my daughter was one of the last babies to be adopted in the west from the territory of Nunavut and this is a result of a changing political landscape which included establishing an Inuit territory. The political agenda in the North has resulted in a redefinition of appropriate adoption placements, and thus the threshold of adequate responses to Inuit children. Having them stay, as much as possible, in their Inuit homeland is a response to an important need, a response I cannot provide.

Walker's model is not just concerned with how we define our moral responsibilities, but as well, with the idea of "integrity" which she relates to what she calls a kind of "reliable accountability" (p. 64). Her view argues against a view of integrity which is equated with "maximal evaluative integration, unconditional commitments, or uncorrupted fidelity to a true self" (p. 63). Her concern with integrity is linked to what she believes to be a problematic and often intuitive view of integrity, where it is defined (or describes the person who has it) as self-referential and unchanging, a global rather than local quality. We can describe those who have or do not have integrity, but as Walker notes, we can also foreclose the possibility of some people having integrity.

Walker also argues that the kind of moral responsibility we have to those in our lives, the ways in which we sort out what those commitments look like, their lifespan in our relationships and how we consistently respond to or conceptualize them means "there's no detaching a picture of integrity from some substantive view about morality" (p. 66). Walker rejects the view of integrity that requires a corresponding view of the self as remaining consistently the same, such that integrity is a whole-life referent. She thinks of it rather as a reasonably consistent tendency to be counted on as morally reliable as possible given the extent and variety of the communities to which we are morally accountable. This idea of integrity as "local" distinguishes it, in this research, from the sense of it as an unqualified commitment to a set of principles or projects that determine our actions independent of the ways in which the moral demands of our lives may change.

There is, in any life, and certainly in the North, a surfeit of ethical demands that arise out of dependencies, those relationships that make the expectation of our response reasonable. Some of these seem obvious, such as those of our children (although the discussion of my daughter above renders even these obvious cases ambiguous). Others are more unpredictable such as the ability to give aid to a stranger in trouble (Walker, 1998), or abstract, like my responsibility to residential school survivors. Moreover, these relationships change as new ones are added and others dropped. We also interact with others at particular intersections of histories and times. The problem arises around how we can claim to be leading some kind of moral life – executing and defending our moral actions – without becoming awash in circumstances where we could, in some way, respond. When you represent a resource rich institution, like the government of the Northwest Territories, and part of your organizational mandate *is* to respond with these resources to those who are dependent on the expertise you have to offer, the call for response is constant and dispersed through a vast territory of communities and needs. Does this make the possibility of acting with integrity more difficult?

This kind of constant and unbounded call for response may be seen as posing a threat to the boundaries of our own agency, and to a definition of a life we can properly call our own. Walker (1998) believes that a framework of relational ethics (the "expressive-collaborative" model") allows us to see what we are doing as we construct individuating narratives of our lives. These narratives, while our own stories, are neither "private nor idiosyncratic" (p. 65).

These narratives are stories that we tell ourselves and each other about our moral accountability, coherence, and dependability, but as Walker notes, these stories are only partial ones and it is easy to see how they change, as our own lives change and different commitments or the possibility of commitments are brought into them. That is why Walker considers the presence of three types of narratives important.[vi]

The first type is a "narrative of relationships," an understanding of what any particular relationship means now, what it might mean in the future, how it may change and the impact that change will have. This type of narrative allows us to understand the foundations of our relationships, the responsibilities within it and how these responsibilities may change or drop during the life of the relationship[vii]. A second narrative type is a "narrative of moral identity" (p. 68), which helps us keep track of "what a person cares for, respond to, and takes care of" (p. 68). This narrative is important to us, Walker believes, because we do respond selectively, weighing a number of factors, and do so in our everyday decision-making as well as when we consider larger decisions around, for example, collective action. A narrative of moral identity "gives our deliberations a great focus and refinement" (p. 69) but also allows others to see where we stand.

[vi] These narrative types are perhaps more appropriately thought of (in my view) as different themes, often co-present and interwoven in a particular story or reflection though I shall use Walker's phrasing.

[vii] My daughter Jesse, for example, is a cross-cultural adoption. When we were assessed as potential parents, we promised to make sure Jesse had the opportunity to experience her Inuit culture. I also met her birth mother in Winnipeg and promised to introduce Jesse to Christianity. These promises were made while I lived in the North, and would have been much easier to keep, so now my husband and I are thinking through the resources we can access from the South. I have future concerns, as well, that my friends who have natural children do not, such as her alienation from me, the sorts of racist barriers she may face and so on. My historical relationship with the birth mother and the social services division of the government, how my move to the south has and will impact these relationships, my thinking through relationships I need to form for Jesse in Alberta – all of these are part of the narrative of Jesse's adoption and my relationship to her.

The third narrative type that is central to our moral lives is the story of our moral values, "a history of moral concepts acquired, refined, revised, displaced, and replaced, both by individuals and within some communities of shared moral understandings" (p. 70). Understanding why you make particular choices provides you and others with both coherence and transparency. Your reasons for doing what you do may not always be acceptable but you are accountable for your choices.

The "expressive-collaborative" model that Walker describes suggests a "moving horizon" of commitments, but Walker does not believe that this speaks against the possibility of acting with integrity. We commonly think of integrity as acting with maximal consistency throughout a life, and that this consistency is borne from our adherence to a core self that is unchanging and unaffected by the changes our lives bring. This kind of moral stalwartness is aligned with a version of autonomy where I need only to consult with my self for matters of moral weight. Further, the self I consult within some versions of autonomy is only reliable if I am socially situated to be leading a life of my own choosing. As Walker notes, the temptation for many is to regard autonomy of this nature as inextricably linked to any possibility of integrity, but she rejects this view:

> We are layers of various overlapping histories of traces of many encounters and relationships; these coexist in various states of stratification or alternation as we live our lives. My present self owes debts to my past one, and my future self is deeply dependent on the choices and self-understandings of my present one. I owe things to myself in these and perhaps other ways, just as I owe things to others for which they reasonably or crucially depend on me. This

> layered, nested and, "ensemble subjectivity" might sound a little exotic; I have tried to show that it and its kind of integrity are familiar. (p. 75)

When we describe our work as fluff, it may well be true. At times, we all do work which seems pointless. The integrity of our work, however, cannot depend strictly on what we regard or define as valuable. Nor, is it a matter of agency in terms of defining the kind of work we want to do. Both of these standards for valuable work are, in many ways, self-referential. Put through the lens of the three narratives of an ethic of responsibility, evaluating our work requires us to think about, first, the impact of the work on the relationships we have, either locally or globally and second, to situate that work within a value framework and to be accountable for the present outcomes and future possibilities. The idea that we are a mosaic of past and future relationships and moral decision-making, makes the notion of collaboration that much more important. Of course, holding our work up to this lens does not guarantee it still won't be "fluff", but we have brought "focus and refinement" to our thinking about it, and it is through collaboration our ensemble subjectivities are formed and through expression, our moral paths are carved. Acting with integrity makes both visible.

Thus, Walker's idea of integrity, and the discursive resources necessary to establish this notion play an important role in the understanding of the work stories in this research. Our integrity cannot depend strictly on our ability to choose our own moral course with reference only to what we define as valuable. It also does not depend on an idea of agency in terms of self-determination. These are individual notions related to self-determination, but the work demands an ever-present eye on outcomes and the effect of those outcomes, (particularly as they are embedded in program or policies).

I want to talk further about Walker's work as it relates to the idea of integrity and the possibility of being said to have acted with integrity. We cannot all tell the same stories with the same authorial status. In conditions of subordination or oppression, our narratives can be "*disqualified*" under the assumption that people struggling with these conditions cannot possibly have any integrity, faithful and consistent commitments to stories of moral value and response. As Walker notes, too, the assumption that those with diminished social status, cannot have integrity, "deflects scrutiny of the kinds of responsibility and tests of commitment that privileged positions may allow some to duck or hand off to others" (p. 78). The extent to which our agency is thwarted is not the same for everyone: I may not have the same kind of narrative authority to tell certain kinds of stories as the president of the college does, but I have considerably more than a student in a literacy program. Positions of oppression are not all the same.

While I have been concerned with the idea of agency, I want to re-establish the idea of agency that Hartman (1991) favors, that of makers and interpreters of our own plot lines, but not as isolated and autonomous auto-biographers. We are in communities of social and political action. Making sense of a life has more to do with mapping a coherent moral strategy and coming to some consciousness of how categories of meaning are arrived at than it does with being able to say I am this kind of person always and in every circumstance no matter how that self is threatened or disqualified. It may be interesting to ask how one sees oneself essentially, and women may be able to identify some quality or attribute, but the result is impoverished understandings of how those descriptions were arrived at and a dangerous leaning towards a version of autonomy that ignores that we have moral commitments to those whose lives are intertwined with our own. Walker's (1998) framework, I believe, helps draw this autonomy-agency distinction while illuminating an important aspect of why we bother telling stories at all and what the consequences are of telling them from different authorial positions.

Walker has one other last point that I think is important to the overall theoretical frame of this research. This is the question of how and why women resist the narrative scripts that have been written for them. Walker believes that:

> Women vastly more privileged than slave women have often contested their canonical gendered scripts of motherhood, daughterhood, sexuality, or housewifery. The reason, I think, is not simply that these scripts are normative, for men's are too. They are normative stories of not merely relational but subsumed identities, ones that are seen in our society as a function of, or in terms of functions for, someone else whether or not women themselves always so see them. For women to whom they apply this means being pressed towards self-descriptions that serves plot functions in someone else's tale. (p. 80)

Constructing our own narrative conventions involves two important ideas. I believe that Walker (1998) and Hartman (1991) are suggesting that constructing narrative is essential to our sense of self, not because we need a narrative that captures and holds our essence, but because the self is a result of the various stories of our relationships and commitments that give our lives a sense of coherence and are more than as Walker says, "one damn thing after another." I would suggest that our ability to engage in these narratives is a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for change, resistance and awareness of identity construction. Second, our constructing of narrative is in social relation to others and this relational nature gives both narrative continuity to our selves while shaping our epistemic categories and our moral understanding. I came to understand that these two ideas were bracketing my understanding of the stories the women in this research told me. As well, these two ideas allow the critical reflection on stories, which I came to believe, was essential to this research given the context of education in the North.

I have discussed stories as important determinants of an ethic of responsibility. Stores are more than instrumental to us and in the next section, I continue to explore and expand on the concept of "story" as it is understood in this research, particularly in terms of what interpreting stories involves.

The Meaning of Experience

Witherell and Noddings (1991) suggest that: "Stories and narrative, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known" (p.1).

Narrative has gained legitimacy in educational research, Stone (1995) suggests, not only because of the richness of its metaphorical and personal story fabric, but "the romantic longing for community and for stories that no longer seem to count" (p. 173). Or maybe haven't counted yet. In Chase's (1995) work with female superintendents, women with power are still unusual enough for their stories to hold a particular kind of interest for us. So too, stories of the "mother, the housewife, the hysteric, the midwife" are all stories, as Sawicki (1991) notes, which "fall below the services of science" so have not been visible in research (p. 215). To bring these stories to light as Chase and many others are doing is to count them as essential to our knowledge of the communities in which we live, and one of the most potent vehicles for surfacing untold stories has been through narrative research. As Walker (1997) notes,

> Not everyone is allowed or enabled to tell just any life (or other story). The stuff of lives to be told, the discursive means available to telling them, and

> the credibility of the story-tellers are apt to differ along familiar lines of class, gender, and race, and perhaps other lines, even rather local ones, as well. (P.78)

Early theorists such as Miller (1976), Gilligan (1977), and Belenky et. al.(1986), were instrumental in foregrounding women's personal experiences to say something explanatory about women's lives more generally. They and other argued for a re-conceptualization of theoretical conclusions drawn by and for men but abstracted to preserve the illusion of including women's experiences as well. These authors used women's stories to collapse the distinction between the public world of scientific research and the private lives of women in order to say something politically forceful about the disappearance of women's stories from our culture's collective anthology. However, if we treat stories as simply expressions of experience, and merely missing experience at that, we overlook important features of their social construction, which mask the historical, political, and social conventions that produced them.

Scott (1992) argues that we are constituted by our experience; that we do not have experiences as much as we seek to explain and understand them, and through those explanations, provide the foundation of our knowledge. Looked at this way, knowledge about who we are and what our lives are like is produced historically and contingently, given our particular placement in history and discourse. I may have meant something like this when once I was orienting a new college instructor, just transferred from the school where he had taught in the primary grades. As we talked generally about using the experiences of the adults as catalysts for writing, I had the sense that he did not fully appreciate the change of context from elementary to adult learning. I tried to encourage him to extend his thinking of experiences as not just the events or feelings adults may be able to narrate for further use in the classroom, but as constitutive of a certain kind of history that both he and I and the learners continued to live through our work. There are reasons why we are engaged, at this particular time, in teaching adults to read and write. What are they? And what might their experiences reveal about the juncture of political and historical discourses such that these learners now feel the need to fulfill what they have somehow learned is lacking in their lives?

Scott (1992) suggests experience is mistakenly treated as unproblematically transparent, but this can be a particular problem, not just for the narrator, but also relationally with her audience. As Walker (1997) discusses, the problem of authorial status means that some stories count while other do not, depending on the position of the story-teller and the relative position the story-teller has to her audience. An example below of my treatment of stories in adult education, once thought by me to be relatively straightforward, illustrates the extent to which the interpreter can impose dynamics of a power relation on the story-teller, such that the story presents itself as "raw data," and is only given meaning through a mediated discourse of power, in this case, "teacher-as-expert."

As an adult educator, I treated stories in the classroom as pure experience and would publish them unselfconsciously in any venue I could find. Because the goal of the program I taught in was to develop literacy (only English literacy, however), I felt justified in "getting the students' words out there," but I never critically thought about how the stories were being interpreted or whose interests this publishing served. This less examined side of story telling became clearer to me as a result of an experience I had in one of the communities where I taught.

One story telling evening in Rae, to celebrate International Women's Day, a group of women learners in a re-entry program[viii] read their stories at a public potluck dinner. These stories had been constructed in the classroom under my direction. Most of the stories were about the women's perception of their growth and change (generally viewed as positive outcomes in a re-entry program). Then it was one of my students' turns. She had struggled with the writing in class and when she began to read to the audience that night, she was suddenly unable to continue; she began to cry after the first sentence or two. We were all surprised into inaction; it was unusual to see someone cry in public. Margaret, an Elder sitting next to me at the event, told me to read the story for her and so I did.

Now, in retrospect, I wonder why it was so hard for her to tell that story to that audience at that particular time and place, and whether I did the right thing by becoming the narrator for her words. Her writing of those personal experiences took place in the classroom, during English, and though she struggled with the grammar and the words, at that time I took that to mean something very different than the struggle I witnessed that night. I was stuck on the words in my role as "teacher/corrector." It did not occur to me that she was creating something different with me, something other than a piece of writing, soon to be public. It also did not occur to me that I might have been limiting her to the role of a "student writer/reader." Perhaps she could have shared her own experiences with her classmates, without crying, if she had been able to improvise.

[viii] A re-entry program is generally taken to mean a program that helps individuals re-enter either the workforce or school after an absence, either forced or voluntary. These programs are often designed for women and typically include some form of "life-skills," job search skills and often, literacy or upgrading.

Or perhaps crying was her way of sharing experience, and she would have done so if I had not ushered her back to the student script.

Story telling doesn't report "experience as reality," it creates it as negotiated meaning between teller and listener (Chase, 1995; Fine, 1994; Personal Narratives Group, 1986; Razack, 1993). In retrospect I thought I was negotiating with my learner in a way that would preserve something essential about her through her words. This was a "woman in a re-entry program" story, and it never occurred to me that the position from which she wrote the story would change. It was one story in the unifying category of stories that were presented that night. However, I see now that this category would not do for this student. She saw herself differently placed when she was at the Friendship Centre that night, and I did not reflect on how the discursive structures of the classroom regulated the writing and caused the writer to disappear in the service of "becoming educated." In retrospect, what seems particularly interesting about this story is the student's ability to resist that discourse to the extent that she did.

Walkerdine's (1985) work on young schoolgirls takes up a similar theme around the ability to resist discursive positioning. She demonstrated that there was no single position in which the school girls always found themselves, but rather "a nexus of subjectivities, in relations of power which are constantly shifting, rendering them at one moment powerful and at another powerless" (Walkerdine in Jones, 1993, p.157). Further, Razack's (1993) work with stories in the legal system led her to conclude that not only was the single subject position of women inadequate to describe shifting subject positions, but it also failed to address other features of women's social construction when this subject position is presented as a descriptive category: "Gender, uncontaminated by race, class, disability or sexual orientation is the prism through which daily life is viewed and differences among women fit awkwardly into the story" (p. 58). Gender as a broad category leaves the naming of other positions like race and class, up to the individual, preserving what Alarcon worries about, "the old, autonomous liberal self, only female; another abstraction" (in Razack, p. 58). In this way, if experiences are taken to be illustrative of a "woman's" experiences without attention to the discursive practices that have inscribed her, we may take the story at face value, as raw data to be interpreted. This data may reveal the existence of patterns of oppression for example, or cases of sexual abuse, but we do not understand how these patterns have been constructed in a particular community or how they have come to be maintained:

> Making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not their inner workings or logics; we know that difference exists, but we don't understand it as constituted relationally. For that we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produces their experiences. (Scott, 1992, p. 25)

I placed my student awkwardly into the position of "student" because this was the natural oppositional position to "teacher," and so this position served my own needs. She was also a "woman in a re-entry program," leaving her anonymously grouped with an entire class of women, undifferentiated by their own personal histories. In the end, she was left to name herself and her various struggles in the community, and found that far too difficult to do in the setting I imposed on her.

For this research, the idea that all stories are to be embraced, generically, as just counter-hegemonic is to risk submerging the ways in which we variously account for our own or other's experiences beneath an overarching explanation of gender (or "student, " for example). We may not only miss out on the individuating characteristics of a life, we also overlook the historical conditions that have produced the experiences (Scott, 199). Because stories from oppressed groups (the narrators have been "silenced,"[ix]) stand in opposition to normative accounts, that is, stories that have been discursively constructed by those in privileged positions, they risk being taken uncritically at face, and truth-value, and the language of these stories is seen as representing reality rather than constructing it (Razack, 1993; Usher, 1989).[x] While these stories may be in the service of challenging the norm, their narrative authority reaches beyond merely oppositional accounts. They can also offer a perspective, "which recognizes and examines the effects of normative models, whilst producing the possibility of other accounts and other sites of identification" (Walkerdine, 1985, p. 13).

I anticipated that the stories in this research would contain contradictions and paradoxes, that because someone chose to "take themselves up" in one manner today, it would not mean that this would be the way they would position themselves tomorrow or at the next meeting. What is of interest is how the stories make sense of those different positionings. There is a range of possibilities for defining what it is like to be a woman administrator in the North, but these possibilities are limited: "different meanings provide both limitations and possibilities for what women and girls in these contexts can do and be, and how they can understand themselves" (Jones, 1993, p. 159). Meanings shift within various discursive contexts; each meaning brings with it attendant possible actions, vocabulary, meaning, affect and is limited by what is culturally known as possible. There is, however, no "gender, or class or race-neutral space in which to develop different meanings, but there are gaps created as together we explore the idea that some subjectivities are not pre-ordained and that resistant discourses are possible (Jones, 1993). I treat the idea of resistance in more depth in chapter four, but the following excerpt from one of my conversations with a woman named Nancy, introduces an example of how one woman understands her resistance to a particular discourse while constructing narratives of the sort to which Walker (1998) refers.

[ix] This term is taken from the book, "Naming Silenced Lives, (1993). D. Mclaughlin and W. Tierney (Eds.) The book addresses methodological issues with respect to narrative accounts of those "individual who have been deprived of a voice without their consent (LeCompte, 1993), hence the term "silenced." Included in this category are "children, the disabled, women, members of minority groups, homosexuals, and lower participants in formal organizations" (p. 10).

[x] Bruner (1987) notes, "life narratives obviously reflect the prevailing theories about "possible lives" that are part of one's culture."

In this story, Nancy describes the reception of one of her ideas at a meeting of high-level officials. She begins by talking about her early entry into the role of administrator and her experiences with being dismissed by men. She muses that she was competent in her position, although being dismissed made her question that, but she also might have "rattled a few chains."

I: Because of your competence? Or just your style?
N: Could be…may be.
I: What makes you think that when you look back on it now? Do you think that was related to being dismissed that you were getting to people a little bit?
N: I don't think it was a big common thing. I think a little bit…for example, like I was telling you about the human resource plan that's being developed based on a bunch of wants and not needs and raising that in the meeting and I don't know if the people involved in it around the table were going, "Oh, ah-ha!" but its kind of like they came in with a position and I'm coming in with another side which might be making sense. I mean its not my own, I read it in a book. I took a course on it and so that there's a back up over it. You can't easily say, you know, "all this work that we've done here? - It's rotten and you are right!" So one of the retorts to that is, if you can't be dismissive of the idea, to be dismissive of the person.

The people at the table challenged Nancy's authorial status, but in the interview this is not what she focuses on. She tells this story as an example of how she positioned herself differently, and perhaps, annoyingly, as she worked through the process of defining a new role for herself, that of a woman administrator. This example is part of a larger discussion around dismissiveness and other strategies Nancy employed such as dressing more professionally, and learning to disengage from the dismissiveness for example, all of which she saw as carving space for herself at the Board table, "so maybe you won't be getting quite the whatever you've been getting…some of the dismissiveness or maybe some of the kinds of casual conversation you didn't like or some of the not accepting of what you had to say." She doesn't recall resenting these strategies; they were necessary to her at the time, as she was engaged in reframing her subject position. She moved from teacher to adult educator to a regional supervisor and in each successive move, more was required of her to work with "the boys."

If I look at this experience simply as a recounting of the facts, I might miss opportunities of the sort Razack (1993), Scott (1992), and Walker (1997) talk about. While it is true that Nancy does not have the same narrative status as the men she worked with (they could wear sweats, she tells me, and might not even notice if someone was being dismissive of them), she sees the discourse of organizational work for what it is and works within it – pushing against some of the boundaries in a way that is her own and accepting other limitations. Where legitimacy is a more pressing concern for her, is in her professional relationships with other women: "There's certain levels of importance. It's very important to me that certain people I work with view me as a legitimate professional. That would be you and (names a few more women). That's what's critically important."

The working relations that Nancy has, both with men and women, provide the reflections of her working life that Nancy uses to understand her place in the organizational world. "But you also need some notion that the world is also seeing the same thing," she said. In this sense, Nancy's reflection on her own actions involve her understanding a sense of congruency between her actions and the rules of the discourses, that frame her work. But Nancy also frames her work around the moral relationships and commitments to the professional women in her life and I know that over the years, these narratives of relationships have been consistently defined and responded to. From Walker's (1998) point of view, the coherence of Nancy's narratives do not depend on a similar coherent self for Nancy to be acting with or feeling like she is acting with integrity. Nancy's integrity in this case, is her consistency in her responses to the relationships she feels committed to. This "narrative of relationship" in Walker's terms, does not establish Nancy's autonomy nor her imperviousness to discourses, but it does open up for Nancy, possibilities of acting at the confluence of discourses and her narrative threads. Her moral commitment to her job is clear as well, but she plays with other boundaries, re-inventing herself as she sees necessary, while claiming a commitment to a self, "…the self doesn't change," she tells me at one point. For Nancy, the self that she sees as having most importance to her identity as an administrator is the "competent" self, and the strategies of dismissal to which she responds are those that threaten that sense of competence.

Conclusion

As I reflected on the tapes and transcripts of Nancy's interviews, I remember thinking about the impact of maturity on an understanding of the self. Another woman in the research, Jean, a longtime women's rights activist and exceedingly clear on our work values and what she would and wouldn't do or respond to in a work environment, also told me the story of a friend who was older and who had mentored her in the early years of her evolving feminism. She told me of how this woman had matured to a certain stage, as Jean had, of comfort within her own "skin," and how the fights were still important, but she framed them differently now.

Nancy's narrative of relationships, seen through her commitment to her woman colleagues, her narrative of moral identity that compels her to speak to what she values and cares about at work, even when she anticipates the dismissive response, and her narrative of moral values, the story of how she comes to care for what she does and how that understanding has been shaped and re-shaped by her experiences, are all narratives that seem grounded, as well, in the reflections of a mature life. This maturity is part of a reflective life that allows us to view our own narratives from the changing perspective experience allows us. As Walker (1998) notes, we do not have just "one shot" at telling certain stories. We are also theorists of our own experience, neither taking it as settled narrative, nor viewing it as unambiguous explanation of our actions and intents (Scott, 1992).

The next chapter, Chapter Four: Administration as Road Trip, continues with the analysis of stories to include the notion of context and how that context influences story telling as epistemic journeys in the ethical frame of our work.

CHAPTER FOUR: ADMINISTRATION AS ROAD TRIP

On an early summer evening a few years ago, I was invited to my first "motolaunch" with a group of women who were friends and colleagues. This time, the actual "moto" left the driveway. Sometimes my friend just moved it back and forth and had her husband take pictures (someone remarked that they'd never been in the motor home when it was actually moving). But this time we had steaks to barbecue and a collection of "motococktails" and drove out to a local campground for the inaugural trip, the start of summer for my friend.

The "Moto" was an old one, given to her by her mother when her father died a couple of years ago. Helen remembers a trip with her parents down the Alaskan highway in it and then it was never pressed into service again. Later in the summer it would carry her family to her mother's cabin in the Yukon. Now it is crowded with "motosnacks" and laughter and threats of "motosuits" when a cupboard swings open and hits me on the head.

We are all in and around (some past) forty, so this is a bit daring to be out so late on a Thursday night. Even though there will be tired young children to get up tomorrow for daycare and I am chairing my first committee on a new initiative, we don't think about the lateness of the hour or the tiredness tomorrow (When tomorrow comes, the groaning over headaches and lost sleep will be part of the experience.). I am happy, as I always am, to be in the company of such women: funny, smart, irreverent, our stories carrying the reminiscence of the Rugged Adventurer plot. We may live in comfort, but we are still ready for anything. We *chose* to go only as far as this park.

The motolaunch is a spring ritual for these women and is important on several different fronts. It augurs the end of another dark winter and the plain difficulties that cold weather brings to our work. It is hosted by Helen, born and raised in the Yukon and so just a little bit more Northern (i.e., tougher and more rugged) than the rest of us. It brings together women who work together on and off over the year, but seldom are together like this. But mostly, it is celebratory, through stories, of the difficulties of work and the fun we can make of those difficulties. Not all the stories could be called comedies --I feel sometimes troubled as I listen, but we are celebrating spring and each other's company and so we are careful of our story telling roles.

At the time, I wished I had brought my tape recorder although the language would have been too salty for academic standards. It struck me, as I listened to my friends, how these were the times, like the careful planning of this spring ritual, where the complexity of women's lives was most evident to me. The stories woman tell in each other's company come from all manner of times and places and include an enormously varied cast of characters including family, workers, strangers, and friends. In my research, too, as we sat with a tape recorder between us, women told me about their working lives, often framed by their children and their friends, but the connections to work were more explicit. In this trip, the connections between the office and Helen's father's motor-home are assumed either self-evident or unimportant. Work may have brought us all together, but the connections between our working lives and the experiences that have formed us reach far beyond the frustrations of being the only woman at a Senior Manager's meeting to include our own histories and the rich mixture of all the people that inhabit our lives.

The metaphor of road trips is an appropriate place to begin the task of analysis of the conversations in this research. The metaphor itself makes use of a literary event which is seen as the almost exclusive purview of men (Daly and Dawson, 1998), and so in many ways has great appeal for this research as "women-in-administration" stories also elbow in on previously male dominated ground. Daly and Dawson (1998), editors of a collection of women's road stories, talk about the road story as being an American form which has celebrated, typically, men's fleeing from the "civilising (i.e., restraining) force of women" (p. ix), in which women figure as domesticating influences at home or at interesting stops along the way. The authors set out to gather stories of women on the road and found that as often as men flee from constraints in their stories, women set out *purposively* to "do something rather than seek freedom from something" (p. x). Their stories differ, too, in how much attention is paid to the actual travel, much as road shows for women administrators have larger themes, but are also about perilous encounters with bad weather and horrible accommodation.

In the following passage, a character in one of the stories, pontificates for her travelling companion's video recorder (rather pompously, as her exasperated companion narrates it) on the meaning of the road as it relates to her feminist art:

> I really want to tackle *paint,* you know, really directly, in a really direct kind of way.' (She runs her fingers through her hair and scowls.) "But it's important to be somewhat elusive as well, elusive without being evasive…It's like this road tour." (She gestures expansively.) "Here we are taking a very *thrusting* action, a very direct and straight*forward* tradition if you like, and …well…we're drifting with it. We have no direction – or do we? We're playing here - at least *I* am, - with the idea of non-*linear* narrative, with sub*vert*ing the road, using mimicry and yet attaining something entirely *original*." (She smiles). "And entirely feminine. And what is the feminine if not a frontier? We are rewriting the desert here, and I aim to capture that on canvas, the *essence*, the…It's like – a worn, dusty, old piece of rope – that's been used for tying steer and towing trucks – and suddenly it's stretched and pulled and ex*tend*ed, until there's a lot of *space*

> within it – until it's more hole than fibre, if you like, and you look at it again, and it's a lace tablecloth. You know? (Lights a Kent)" (Perkins, 1998, p. 6. emphasis in original).

The artist, in her play with gender images, illustrates one of the strategies that women utilize in their own straightforward action into the administrative frontier: "tackling" male symbolism (the rope) and making it something distinctly, if not "feminine," at least consonant with their point of view as women. This imagery is difficult to come by during our conversations -- the equivalent terms to such metaphors as empire building for men are inadequate -- the best one of the women could come up with was "queendom" when she talked about building her network of support but she felt dissatisfied with the term.

She also illustrates another aspect of the metaphor of the road for this research: that is, how our journeys are both physical and epistemic. They are physical in the sense of the change of place in which we do our work, and epistemic in the sense that the places we travel to contribute to the shaping and re-shaping of our knowledge base in administration; this chapter examines how this restructuring takes place, depending on particular locales. I use a particular story told to me to illustrate how one woman described her administrative life and actions very differently depending on where she was and by doing so, I want to examine how it is that different locations provide different story contexts that can disrupt narrative unity. In that sense, I use the metaphor of road travel to capture some of what Chase (1995) found to be interesting in her research on women administrators' stories, that of how they shaped their self-understandings and made sense of contradictory experiences of power and subjection. In this Chapter, I look at at one woman's stories of work at home and "on the road" and to consider what these respective locations offered her in terms of discursive strategies.

This line of reflection is important, because as I progressed further with my own writing, I began to reflect uneasily on how I was choosing a certain way of understanding my own Northern story which begins this work (as an adult educator in Wha ti), and consequently, I worried about my own lack of awareness of how those choices might have been influenced by the kind of naiveté I describe about my beginnings in the North. The very categories I chose to use in describing my community of story-tellers, "Northerners and Southerners," illustrates my own understanding of an important piece of mine and other identities in the North, and this piece is described as a series of oppositions, suggesting a particular view of a settled, understandable life and the wild, unsettled frontier of work. I remember a conversation I had with a new instructor who told me his mother was thinking of visiting him in the new community where he now lived. He told me how curious she was about his life in the North, and that when he went home to Montreal, all he had were pictures and stories of the North and how dissatisfying that was for him, because it reduced his life to vignettes, and the community that populated his narrative to a category of other – the "mysterious." When I was in Wha ti, and only in that community although I travelled to others, friends and family from the south sent me care packages with items they thought I must be missing – detective novels, nice clothes, chocolates filled with liqueur, good coffee – the comforts of home. It was true that I did miss those things, but I had also described a life for them where the resonant theme was clearly deprivation as I "roughed" it in the north.

The other piece of the road metaphor I utilize for this research is how travel provides opportunities to perform particular roles differently, to present a different self.

We may maintain a consistent role, often as a title, but how we perform that role involves both agency and structure. When I first came to Wha ti, I had no preconceived ideas of how I was to perform in this context, other than what I believed to be part of performing as a "teacher." I wore nylons and high heels in minus 40 below weather, and ran the program as a classroom that one might expect to find in any school (a fair amount of pedagogical control). Other aspects of my life were more familiar to me in terms of role and because of that, I did have preconceived notions of how I was to perform. For example, I had a clearer sense of the expectations of my role as a woman, and further, as a woman in a traditional Dene culture, even though this was an unfamiliar context for me. The first feast I attended I sat on the floor, on my knees, like the other women while men served us. While these cultures and traditions were new to me, there was nothing new about the gendered nature of them. I was able then to make some deliberate and agentic choices about how I would perform certain roles while other expectations of my role performed me. My stories of journeys reflect especially, these two epistemic frameworks. They are one of the reasons why road stories juxtaposed with work stories hold such interest. Travel can bring times of the most uncomfortable vulnerabilities or the opportunity to represent one's self in a different way, safely out of the scripts of the office (Mangham, 1987).

Finally, I use the metaphor of road travel to discuss the idea of how we are framed as subjects by our experiences, and to illustrate the complexity of these experiences as we sort out what that framing involves politically and socially in relation to those in our working lives. This illustration explores the expectations we bring to our work encounters, and the impact on our identities of such expectations as a well as fuller account of what kinds of impacts can be said to be layering our identity in the post-modern sense of a "number of selves."

I turn now to an exploration, in more detail, of the story of one woman as she talks about travel to a community where the college was running a program that had been negotiated under very difficult circumstances. The Aboriginal organization doing the delivery had not wanted anything to do with the college but because of government policy and funding requirements, as well as accreditation issues, they were forced into a "partnership." The woman, who managed this grouping of programs for the college, travelled to the delivery site regularly to meet with the students and the instructor. As she told me this story, I remembered the context well because I had had the same assignment with the same program and organization after she left the North. I knew the difficulties this travel involved.

This particular story of travel has, like all travel logs, a beginning and an end that are part of an on-going story of a particular kind of work in the North which involves partnering, as much as possible, with Aboriginal organizations. This is important for a number of reasons, both pragmatic and political, but the actual work becomes a very contested terrain around the identities of the individuals and organizations involved. In this particular case, the woman was responsible for managing a new partnership that, as mentioned above, was a forced issue – most certainly for the Aboriginal organization. As she told me, the administrators were very clear that "they were only working with us because of the certification," and they had several issues with the college which Mary carefully thinks about as she tells me what the work was like (this is before I knew I would be involved in this dynamic as well; at the time of this story, I had not yet returned to work from education leave). As Mary described it, the original negotiation around the partnership agreement was very confrontational from the start and she identified many reasons she thought that was so. The individuals representing the Aboriginal organization presented, for Mary, a complex set of issues: self-government and the attendant politics, anger at the college, and personal beliefs and hurts, an awareness of what needed to be done socially for their community and defensiveness about their credentials, and a commitment to gaining control over institutions, including control of this particular program. Their disdain for the college was clear, and the initial meeting set the tone for all subsequent trips to a community in which Mary faced, as she called it, "a ring of fire." Students would begin by talking about how wonderful their experience with the program was and how much they admired the instructor, and then they would turn to the college and describe how college staff ignored their needs. Mary came to expect this "attack" and sat through it, acknowledging that at some level, it was necessary and this process needed to be attended to before the actual work could begin.

I asked her if she dreaded those trips (I thought to myself, how could she not?). She responded that although they were difficult, she also enjoyed the challenge of them, and that they were also circumstances in which her skills as a counsellor, social worker and program manager were the most affirmed. She was very good at circles, described in the context of this story, as a particular process where everyone can say what they want to say without interruption or defence. "I'm a very good at, um…how would I say it…I'm a supportive person. I'm a non-threatening person. I can hear the emotions behind what people are saying." She also left a young baby at home that first year and told the women in the program that was difficult for her. And they responded to her because, as Mary told me, these circles were not just about particular issues but about sharing how you were personally. Interestingly, this put her in a competitive position with respect to the male instructor. She related to the woman on a level that would have been foreclosed to him, but most of his legitimacy derived, Mary thought, from the adoration from and control of, women.

After Mary left and when I returned from education leave, I became responsible for these programs, and I too, experienced the "ring of fire." At that point, I had many community trips under my belt, and it was the students that I felt most comfortable with in the community learning centres and the best part of my visit, once I had the more difficult, political meetings over with. However, even though this was familiar ground, I had talked by then to Mary and others at the college and I felt a lurch of anxiety as I pulled in for my first visit. The students were in a circle, as Mary described it, and right from the start, I felt the sinking feeling that lets me know I've begun badly. I brought them new day-timers and pens and handed those out, made some weak attempts at humour and that sat silently as the questions began. Unlike Mary, I would never claim to be good at circles. I couldn't hear any emotions behind the questions beside criticism and hostility and couldn't begin to think of anything personal to share to start relating on that level. Most of my energies were spent on trying to stem the rising tide of defensiveness I began to feel, and I do not know if it went badly for me because of my preconceived expectations. I do remember wishing, though, that Mary was here.

Meetings around this program never got any easier for me. I could never find my footing and did not have the legitimacy, at the very least, of being a content expert in that field. I tried to establish myself as an educator first, by talking to staff about graduate work and then talking to the director about being a woman in administration and although I found her completely compelling, I knew that both the instructor and she were dismissive of my role and me. My residual feeling about that time were that they "got away with things" I should never have allowed around funding and curriculum. I could take some solace in the stories others told of this organization, but sometimes all the solidarity in the world does not help you in the lonely three hours of travel before you come to your destination.

Not surprisingly, the experience of this work was very different for Mary and me, and part of that difference is the juxtaposition of her experience in that community and at the campus, and the discourses with which she felt comfortable. In the former context, she felt that she could be who she was professionally and bring her own talents and her natural tendency to understand and experience emotions to her advantage. At her workplace, these same tendencies, the same representation of self, were a liability, even though she sought to maintain some kind of equilibrium between her community self and her campus self. She did this by forging ahead with a strategy of being herself, which for her meant ignoring a script (Mangham, 1978), a result of a particularly difficult relationship with her supervisor which silenced and demeaned her. She asked questions, she let her emotions show, she expressed her concerns, "she decided just to be herself." For Mary, this meant bringing her professional skills to a context in which they were, in her view, undervalued and often ridiculed.

Yet, she persisted in this vein, even though it was the disjunctive one, because it was the way in which she was able to live comfortably with her actions. She described her work life in a sense as a constant struggle to both analyse and resist a particular script, and it is not clear whether she felt her particular resistance was effective insofar as she maintained some sense of personal congruency. In the end, she resigned her position in middle management, and as we talked, she reflected on her feelings of loss and hurt around her leaving that program and position.

Mary's journey to the community that housed the addiction program she was working with, was an opportunity for her to bring into consciousness what she could do well within her constraints at work. She was three hours away from her office, within working contexts every bit as risky as her on-campus life, but Mary remembers some success or at least integrity in that work[xi]. When asked about her present feelings about her effectiveness at the campus at that time, she only responded that she did as well as she could under the circumstances.

It is significant that Mary's afternoon with me involved primarily two stories: one of her work in the community and the other of her experience with a particular supervisor on campus and the fall-out professionally and personally for her. The other interesting aspect of Mary's story is her comfort with analyses of the issues that made working with the Aboriginal organization challenging and her relative unease when talking about her campus experiences. To discuss these two aspects of our conversation together, I draw again upon Walker's (1998) idea of moral commitments and the ideas, suggested earlier, of performance as embodied expectation and performance as role.

My experience with the Aboriginal organization of this story was different than Mary's in one way, I believe, because I had expectations of my relationship with the instructor which were not consonant with *gendered* ideas about how I was to perform my role with him. He was, according to different accounts of those that had worked with him, charismatic in a sexual way and defined his relationships with that strong and present dimension of sexuality. For me, this resulted in discomfiture as I struggled against the role of "female" and struggled towards a sense of legitimacy in other roles such as administrator or educator. I cannot say for certain how I acted with him, but I know there must have been an aspect of deference because I did not always "call him" on behaviours I felt were out of line with the spirit of the agreement or potentially harmful to the college. This is not to suggest that Mary did not experience this discomfort as well -- we never spoke about it -- but she had a frame of analysis with respect to that contract which understood his actions as part of the larger picture of aboriginal rights and addictions issues. I know she did worry about the charismatic way in which the instructor worked with an all woman group in terms of their psychological safety and his shifting boundaries.

[xi] In the interview, Mary used the work "integrity" in the sense that Walker (1998) argues against: the idea of consistent behavior as primarily allegiance to a true self.

I felt the weight of expectations around my identity as a woman, and in the same manner that meta-narratives suppress the small stories, those expectations diminished the possibility of agentic choice in performing my role as a woman administrator differently. In this sense, my gendered identity for this particular community and instructor brought with it embodied expectations that made it difficult for me to perform my role as an educator; I felt these expectations suppress my agency. Judith Butler (1990) understands agency in this way, not as the precursor to acts that establish gender identity, but rather as the object of the constitutive acts themselves. The social agent constructs gendered meaning, which they and the audience come to believe through a repetition of performative acts that reinforces that meaning. This is what I mean here by embodied expectations. These expectations were further complicated by my position socially with respect to this organization overall and how these relationships were understood historically and politically within the larger context of the North. Could I legitimately describe my experiences in terms of diminished status when I was in a more powerful social position? Could I achieve an objective understanding of social position or is the understanding of it always inscribed within relationships?

It is worth exploring what potential responses can be to circumstances of complex epistemological demands when you meet these demands from positions of relative power (although it never felt that way to me). On the whole, my work with the community instructor in this story was much more difficult for me than other experiences of cross-cultural work because of the over-lay of gendered relations where I felt my identity would be contested on grounds of heterosexual expectations. This is to say that I felt I would disappoint the expectations of the relationship if I were to be found wanting, sexually. It was a given I was already found wanting professionally.

Supervising that program was a different experience than my feelings of uncertainty and surprise at the Band Managers' meeting I describe in the Prologue where I did not know what to expect, but was not expecting the difficulty of responding to a hostile group. In both of these stories, however, uncertainty did not necessarily dislodge "settled expectations" in the sense that Campbell (1999) uses the term to describe the grounding of our norms and the formation of our perceptual standpoints. I did expect to be taken seriously, to be treated courteously, and to be affirmed in my role as a professional educator at the Band Managers' meeting. And although I made that experience a funny story for others, it was not until much later that I began to wonder whether the unsettling aspects of the meeting were an overlooked possibility for examining my expectations around my position of privilege. If you do not know what to expect from a situation, but come from a position of power relative to the context or circumstances that pose the questions, you may be surprised, uneasy, discomforted, but these feelings or reactions do not necessarily cause you to examine your own expectations built around a position of privilege unless that is engaged in agentically. Mary theorized her circumstances in a way that was congruent with her actions and her understanding of her role, I told a funny story, but both strategies left settled expectations intact. Where I had difficulty and where Mary's experiences were more problematic were circumstances where we felt performed by other's expectations, where we were, in Butler's (1990) description, constituted not merely by someone else's perception of us, but by embodying the organizing principles and "institutional arrangements" of discourses (p. 9). In my case, the expectations of sexual attractiveness and in Mary's, the expectations of a particular professional discourse.

Reflections on Subjectivity: Coming Home

Both of these reactions to the work with this Aboriginal organization involved reflection on what it meant to be ourselves in particular circumstances. At the beginning of this project I was interested in exploring the idea of a "unitary self," and was anticipating that the stories I heard would lend support to the position of non-unitary subjectivity, taken to mean the self as a site of meaning production rather than an established entity with some kind of essence that remains unchanged and fixed. As I worked through the interviews and reflected on my earlier readings of post-structuralist theories, I found myself visiting this idea once again. What did the modernist concept of "essence" imply, and what does "disruption" to the self actually "feel like" for the subject? How is it we experience such disruptions and most importantly, what do we do about them?

Non-unitary Subjectivity

In Bloom and Munro's (1995) collaborative work on the life histories of women administrators, they seek deeper understanding of the conflicts women experience as they move from classroom teaching to administration. Their thesis involves understanding how "nonunitary subjectivity" operates in these transitions and both the cost and opportunity women experience when they confront dominant and exclusionary discourses of male administration. By "nonunitary," the authors refer to a "subject as constructed at the nexus of multiple subject positions," and are particularly interested in how women administrators construct their identity in the face of the "bifurcated" discourse of educational leadership, which separates women and leaders as mutually exclusive categories. In this sense, they see the women constructed by possibilities, but also able to exercise some choice that influences that construction. This bifurcation parallels Chase's (1995) work where her research interest centres on the disjunction between the discourse of professional achievement on the one hand and "talk about subjection to gender and social inequalities" on the other (p.11). In both of these research projects, [xii] the research program looks at, on some level and at some point, the ways in which women resist dominant stories and how the resulting tension of that resistance shapes their understanding of themselves as subjects in particularly conflicted circumstances.

[xii] Bloom and Munro (1995) and Chase (1995) were interested in the coexistence of power and subjugation in professional women's lives. These projects differ in Chase's focus on the narrative strategies women employ to shape self-understandings, while Bloom and Munro focus on the content of "self-representation" through narrative to uncover how nonunitary subjectivity is negotiated.

Bloom and Munro's (1995) research is reflective as they re-read and share research done separately, looking for how women represent their agency in narrative and being mindful of how the telling and interpretation of stories were vulnerable to misinterpretation, given the agenda of the researcher and a reading of the story which could suggest unitary positions but masked personal conflict. In this way, the authors caution against repeating the same mistake, that of representing a unified subject that conforms to "masculinist discourses and humanist assumptions about the self" (p.103).

In the following passage, Bloom rethinks her approach and interpretation to one women's apparent contradictory representation of herself as both agentic rebel and passive conformist:

> In my desire to locate resistance in teachers, a desire encouraged by Cleo's construction of herself as rebellious against gender norms, I initially did not hear the fragmenting of her subjectivity reflected in the above excerpt about becoming an administrator. I struggled to understand why, despite her prior representation of herself as "wanting to live her own life," she resisted conceptualising herself as an active agent in regard to becoming an administrator. Perhaps what was troubling to me was that her story of deference positioned her as a willing "daughter" to patriarchy's desired subservience. In essence, such deference engages women in a discourse which silences their agency and which therefore thwarted my desire to find resistance. (1995, p. 103)

The author concluded that a closer reading of this woman's story as well as the researcher's agenda yielded the fact that women could act simultaneously as agents as well as be deferential, and this in turn confirmed the idea of nonunitary subjectivity as both consequence and cause of negotiated meaning.

What intrigues me about this passage is how researchers, as interpreters of others' stories, come to a decision with respect to what counts as a case of nonunitary subjectivity," and further, what is necessary for an account of shifting meanings such that our selves or some aspect of them is not fixed. The interviews I did were full of accounts when women experienced different reactions to different circumstances, including feelings of anxiety, alienation, exclusion, and dissonance, but it is not clear to me that these responses necessarily constituted circumstances under which the meaning of their subjectivity was disrupted. In other words, I came to be cautious, as Bloom was, of superimposing a particular analytical frame. Unlike Bloom, I felt that the fact that both agency and passivity appeared in the same passage should not lead to the conclusion that this woman was experiencing any significant moment of shifting meaning. Perhaps her experiences indicate nothing more complex about the self than that events which happen are not always a result of our own agency. Nonunitary subjectivity must mean something more, particularly in terms of the potential for the disruption to our narratives to bring to consciousness the shape of the discourses we are trying to resist.

There were also cases in my own interviews of women talking about various experiences and reactions to difficult circumstances and concluding that sometimes the resolution was no more complicated than learning to live with the contradictions. Here is one example of a story from one woman about a difficult employee she was supervising, and who was continually confrontational:

S: But for example, I never confronted him. I just always projected this "Hey, this isn't sweating me, I'm not even picking up on this. Hey everybody, see you all tomorrow, bye!" And I don't know whether boy, he's thinking, " She really is stupid, isn't she?" Or, who knows…who knows…But it's interesting talking about this now because in a lot of ways I'm viewing it as…it really is a piece of history. It really is…it's not a big issue now for me.

I: No, but do you think it's formed part of what you would count as your sort of overall definition of yourself as an administrator? Do you think its formed you at all or were you able to kind of leave that stuff…As the woman you are today did those sorts of incidents, even though they were years ago and they don't bother you any more, I'm interested if that was something that actually formed you in any significant way? Or got to you in any significant way?

S: That's a good question and I don't know. I don't even think I could answer that. I don't know. I'm sure it did because I'm sure…I was just reading some of the work (in the development course) of theorists who are talking about how every experience…well, not every experience…I'm thinking this through… how every experience somehow affects you, who you are or that it affects you to a certain extent. And I couldn't tell you. Well, surely I would be slightly different now than if none of those things had happened to me. But in what way? I don't know that I could articulate it. Maybe I'm a little tougher meaning that my hide isn't quite as sensitive as it was then. But then again…or maybe…yeah, I don't know.

The woman in this case is able to tell several stories of travel and meetings early on in her career where she was challenged or confronted. When I asked her about her strategies for dealing with those circumstances, her understandings of them now and how they may have shaped her, those parts of the interview revealed nothing more complex than her understanding that experience teaches you what's urgent and what's not. It teaches you how what used to "land on you, just doesn't land anymore." I knew what she meant in the sense of passing beyond difficult circumstances, but it still left me with a feeling of impoverished data. Perhaps there was no more to it than that, surely not every experience we have or talk about plays with equal significance in terms of how are subjectivities are formed. I also wondered, though, what relevance these reflections on difficult circumstances had to Butler's (1990) comments on the extent of our choice when faced with the convergence of discourses and what they allow and exclude: "But it is clearly not the case that 'I' preside over the positions that have constituted me, shuffling through them instrumentally, casting some aside, incorporating others, although some of my activity may take that form. The 'I' who would take that form is always already constituted by them" (p. 9). Is it the case that Nancy is under the illusion of choice around how the experiences that she describes impact and constitute her, or does she actively negate some experiences, leave them aside, when she is confronted with multiple discourses and subject positions. I conclude this chapter with reflections, again, on the notion of subjectivity but I reposition my reflections against notions of what it means to be on the road, and at home. I explore the idea that shifts in subjectivity themselves, require agency.

Coming Home – Reflections on Subjectivity II (2001)

At the beginning of Chapter Two, I talked about women's journeys, both physical and epistemological and the invention of ourselves that the road and the work make possible in the North. I was interested in exploring the ways in which our travel shaped our understandings of ourselves, and how travel destinations (communal, relational) performed us in the sense that we are constituted by institutionally sanctioned acts which we internalise and perform and claim as our own, however discontinuous they may feel to us (Butler, 1990). We shape our frontier and make the imagery of the road our own, but we are also shaped by the imagery already in place, and women have various strategies for coping with the dissonance of being constituted in this way. What became more interesting to me was how these strategies were conceptualised on the road and at "home," in the sense of a place we returned to which was culturally and socially familiar.

When asked about why one story unfolded the way it did, the woman responded that there were so many layers: aboriginal/non-aboriginal, men/women, friends/strangers, it was only then that she was giving it any thought; at the time, she "wrote it off." There were so many layers of explanatory possibilities; she was, in a sense "relieved" to be able to do that, to write it off, because she hadn't been able to do this in the past. I asked her what was behind a strategy of "writing something off" in her mind:

> S: Well, I think what it was, was that it did not get to me like some of the earlier things had gotten to me that, you know, just grabbed me and sort of made me feel like where my response was, "I'm an outsider here and I'm not very good at this job and blah, blah, blah. The words there dig and then you kind of…you look at the situation and you just sort of shake your head a little bit, you know? So it was a little uncomfortable but at the same time, I did write it off and maybe in some ways it might have been one of those points where I was starting to come over a hump [here she is describing a barrier for her]of writing that shit off quite quickly – which is not what I did in the early, early days and things would really bother me…things like that.

In my story about Wha ti, I, too, had felt like an outsider but I remained relatively untroubled by that boundary and used it more as an opportunity to explore and expand a role that brought with it a clear definition for me of worth and value, and which called into question the very notion of "outsider" in this context. It was only later in my career that I deconstructed those earlier reminiscences to try and understand what I had not understood before about being in that community, and to understand that I could "travel" to margins, perhaps, but at the time (and today) am still not able to make a claim of "outsiderness" as long as a dominant identity, as white and middle-class, remains intact. Mary's story about her work with the addictions program in an Aboriginal organization also suggests confirmation rather than disruption of a particular identity because her understanding of herself as a particular person with a particular identity is at the centre of her story. When she talked about the difficulties she faced at work, she said,

> You know, being a social worker, I would keep trying to do my …well, I'll tell her how I felt and I'll give her some feedback and I'll communicate openly about what's bothering me. And I would just get squashed; you know (laughs). So after a while I kind of joked about it: "Stupid me, doing the social work routine," because really it did not work here. But again it's the same thing, I'm realising I'm going in a pattern where I decide I don't care. I do the thing that I feel right about doing anyway and sometimes that works and sometimes it doesn't work in terms of changing the person. But yet, you have to decide "how can I live with myself?

How one "lives with oneself" in these cases, is a kind of reconciliation, a falling back on a strategy or understanding that makes the difficulties of particular relationships or exchanges "liveable." In Susan's case, it's a strategy of putting aside discomfort rather than having it challenge feelings of competence or belonging. For Mary, it involves claiming an identity that comes with a set of skills for dealing with people but also having a frame of analysis when the outcomes are not ones she had hoped or worked for. For me, it was seeking refuge in a role, which I believed to have considerable value, value that would not have been available otherwise. I could also retreat, at the end of the day, to a reassuring but fabricated, "shipped-from-Edmonton" reality.

In seeking to understand the importance of these strategies, I turn again to notions of travel, location and expectations. Earlier in this Chapter I referenced work by Campbell (1999), and the idea of "settled expectations," and I want to return to this idea in a fuller version here. I believe that the idea of expectations is critical to an understanding of the work in this context, as it is not clear to me what the "unsettled" feelings expressed in these stories indicate. While the search for gaps in my understanding of women's lives is something I undertake willingly ("happy discoveries" in the words of Probyn, 1990), I cannot shake the uneasy feeling around two issues in particular. One is the complexity of power relations with respect to work with and between Aboriginal organizations and with respect to non-Aboriginal women representing government organizations. While employing notions of settled and unsettled expectations deals with some of the ambiguities that have characterised other's and my stories, the conclusions seem too facile. My second concern relates to the idea of what is meant by nonunitary subjectivity and what implications this idea has for how we act in accordance with the "expressive-collaborative" model (Walker, 1998) of moral accountability that I described in Chapter One.

While it is true that we grapple with the unfamiliar and uncomfortable as women administrators, we are in an interesting position with respect to our placement within organizations at home, and our work with communities on the road. This always felt to me like being between two worlds rather than in the intersection of both. In each context the power relationships and the discursive resources were very different, and the commitments and obligations of each called forth very different responses. I want to suggest that this placement makes not only agency in terms of our actions possible but also makes possible an agentic approach to identity formation, a kind of shifting subjectivity in a particular direction.

I return to my work in Wha ti, the Band Managers' meeting in Fort Simpson and my travel to supervise the addiction program, to try and unpack some of my analytical uneasiness. All of these places required me to leave my "home" which I expected to return to at the end of my travels. In Wha ti, my home was a house with running water, next to the RCMP station and not far from my friend, the nurse, who lived in a fully government outfitted (from VCR to wineglasses) apartment above the nurses' station. My home was not typical because it did have running water and was set up to replicate what a southern home might look like with separate rooms for sleeping, eating and entertaining. It was, in fact, a house set aside for journeying professionals. I brought boxes from my home in Edmonton with me to translate, as much as possible, the familiarity of my life in the south. (When they unloaded the plane, I became embarrassed as the residents commented on how much I had brought with me). The home I returned to on my travels in my position as Director of Community Programs was in Fort Smith and it, too, could have been a home anywhere in the south – a bungalow with a back yard, decorated to reflect my life now as a middle-class woman with a good job in a community with city-like conveniences.

My homes are significant in my own stories because I always *expected* to return to them and structured them to reflect my expectations about what my home ought to look like and provide for me. The idea of returning to them was particularly salient for me when my travels were difficult. In Wha ti, I returned to my home everyday and was separated from the rest of the community by my pictures and running water even though my home was welcoming for others and my students often visited. When I returned home, I returned to a physical place, which embodied physically and culturally my expectations of what my life ought to be like. My home, in other words, contained nothing that might have caused me to question my having it in relation to what others in the community did not have. I thought, often longingly, of returning home when I travelled from Fort Smith to the South Slave and Deh Cho communities, to the safety of my relationship, the familiarity of my social life, and the things and routines that I had come to expect to order my existence. To return to where things were *normal.*

The idea of home is significant as a point of departure and a destination for the complexities of understanding work in terms of travel and expectations. In Campbell's Chapter, "Dominant Identities and Settled Expectations" (1999) she discusses the possibilities of "radical self change" undertaken as a positive political project (p. 118). She connects this idea with the notion of unsettling expectations, which form dominant and privileged identities and looks at various accounts for doing so.

One account is that of Minnie Bruce Pratt (1984), a white, lesbian from the Southern United States, who loses her home and her children when she claims that identity. Her dislocation physically from what she had come to expect would always be a home, occasions her to examine how her home was defined in relation to the exclusion of others. She examines further how her home has structured her expectations about who could live and work where, and how these expectations were aligned with a position of privilege of being white and middle class in the American south. Her failed expectations, ones she was brought up with unselfconsciously and which colluded with the normative expectations of others in the same kind of position, are the catalyst for her re-examination of her historical and social placement and provided motivation for her subsequent politicisation around, for one, anti-racist work. In contrast to Pratt's experience, I had not had the experience of being so displaced. The opportunity to return home from wherever I travelled left my expectations of home intact.

We all return home after our travels, but home also includes, in this context, our organizations. They become part of the dailyness and routine of our home life such that the demarcation between home and office is less obvious than that between Fort Simpson and home or, the Adult Basic Education classroom and the house with running water.

This expectation of familiarity does not provide the catalyst for political self-change in terms of re-organizing one's self in the same way that community travel does. However, while there is a home to return to, the road too, does not unsettle our dominant identities. However difficult travel can be, it is temporary, and though it may provide the occasion to critically self-reflect on the work context, it still does not demand readjusting expectations. In terms of the analysis of this research, this is significant for two reasons.

The first is that organizations, like homes, embody both desire and expectations. They are locales, in the sense that Probyn (1990) uses the term to "designate a place that is the setting for a particular event, the home being the most obvious example" (p. 178). Within these locales, we are in a constant process of negotiating what our expectations are of the "ideal" and what our lives, experienced in the day to day activity of the events of the locale (in the home, making dinner, in the office, chairing meetings) offer us. Nothing is ever as we imagine the ideal to be. For women administrators, that "ideal" is described to us, discursively, by the image of the effective leader. We have read about him (usually) countless times as he moves effortlessly amongst the organization's subordinates, making decisions, adjudicating disputes, behaving rationally, even in the presence of organizational chaos. The desires associated with the locale of organisation are, in part, determined by what we believe the ideal to be, but the line between the ideal in our own construction and what has been "man-made" is not always clear (Probyn, 1990). There was certainly, in all my conversations with the women, a desire to do well, and to be seen as competent and professional. They articulated what competency or professionalism looked like in practice, but these reflections, though, were often tempered by an ideal of practice against which, these women understood, their own professional competencies would be compared. This awareness and reflection seemed to come much more easily to them when they spoke about the locale of the office. This relative ease of reflection contrasted sharply with the locale of cross-cultural work, where women seemed less troubled around how their identities were problematized. The locale of the office was the setting and event in which women in this research struggled the most in terms of issues of their agency. The following excerpt illustrates some of that struggle as this woman tries to explain how she coped with a difficult supervisory relationship while trying to mediate between administration, her staff and her own responsibilities:

I: So, M, over the last year, there must not have been much of …you thought that "Well, here's some real sort of evidence that I'm doing a good job. Your staff is a bit cranky, [the community] wasn't…

M: It was difficult, yeah.

I: So where did you get the feeling that you were doing a good job? Did you believe you were doing a good job?

M: I thought I was doing a reasonable job under the circumstances…and given my personal stressors and work stressors…given the college was not really supportive of programming in the field or understood what the issues were…so I definitely…it was hard for me because after a while I started feeling … as I got more and more work, that I wasn't doing a good job with any of it.

(Later in the interview)

I: What was your staff feeling about what you should have been able to do or not do in terms of mediating that kind of stuff coming from administration?

M: I think they felt that I wasn't standing up strong enough for the program. And my own feeling was, "If you only knew how strong I was. And how much grief I'm getting, because I am standing up. I never…I always brought up the issues I was concerned about with G. I always feel like, "Here I am again doing this. (I) treated her like she's my supervisor and I was going to behave in a way that was the way you are supposed to behave with your supervisor which is discuss any dilemmas you have. But yet, at the same time, I wasn't going to…you know, if I thought the program needed to do something in a certain ways, I was going to say that. You know, because I'm not really…I'm kind of quieter or whatever…they may not have felt I was speaking up as much as I was on behalf of the program. So anyway…

But you know, I knew it was undermining my confidence because you know, a few years

> ago, I felt very confident about my skills as a professional and I was getting acknowledged as a professional and I was doing basically a good job with the things that I'm doing. In the last two years, I was constantly aware that you need to be careful that you don't undermine your confidence…that you don't let this happen to you. But it did, in some ways. And then again, not being able to make any other transition in the college, that sort of hurt as well. And now I've sort of backed away from it. I don't know if I want to do any supervisory roles now. I want to work for myself is the way I feel about it. I don't want to work in an institution where they don't have values and beliefs that are similar enough to mine that I can work with them in a comfortable way. So how much of this is shell-shock because I've been hurt or how much of it is mature self-assessment, I don't know, you know, what skills are or what's the best situation for me. Right now, I'm basically retreating in a way.

In this and other parts of the interview, when we spoke of organizational life, Mary still framed her understandings in terms of her professional background as a social worker. She described her actions as emanating from her understanding of people's issues, and her approach to dealing with them in a way that acknowledged the difficult experiences that may have formed people and how that impacted the way they were with others. However, as I have noted elsewhere, she persisted with this approach even though she felt it was counterproductive to her own needs and in the end, undermined her feelings of competence and worth such that she left the organization. In trying to understand how to work within this context, Mary drew on the professional discourse that was most familiar to her. In retrospect, this discourse did not help her negotiate an administrative relationship that caused her to doubt her own competence and authenticity and certainly the utility (or futility) of her actions.

These parts of the interview were also marked by a different conversational style. The talk was much more "unsettled" in the sense that Chase (1995) noticed when she interviewed women superintendents about their professional lives. In Chase's work, she focused on narrative strategies, descriptions about how women brought two kinds of discourse into the narratives of their working lives: discourse about positional power and leadership on the one hand and discourse about inequality on the other. These two discursive realms, professionalism and inequality were distinguishable by how "settled" the talk was around them. While the women she interviewed were able to talk easily about their experiences as women leaders, even when those experiences were problematic, when the discussion turned to stories of inequality or subjection, the interview became awkward and self-conscious. For Chase, these strategies were a window on the way in which "women shape their self-understandings and how they make sense of their contradictory experiences of power and subjection" (p. 5).

Unsettled talk in this case indicates the same type of struggle for the women in this research, but in contrast to the road, the locale of the office and the home holds different discursive constraints and also offers different discursive resources for describing experience, so while the talk may have been unsettled, it was not clear that expectations of power were. There was a sense of home holding an ideal of practice that we reached towards, but this ideal was not necessarily "politized" in terms of the fragmenting of our experience and it did not lead to a re-examination of our expectations of power in relation to our communities. I came to worry much more about my individual experiences as a supervisor in relation to others in the organization than I did about the work of the organization. How I struggled with the locale of the office is a different story altogether than how I came to see my struggles on the road. The power differential of work in the communities meant that no matter how difficult it became, I knew I was going "home" and the difficulties could not follow me there; they lacked the discursive resources. The discursive construction of home offered me its own rewards:

safety, familiarity, known contexts that no matter how difficult, did not call into question my feelings around my identity – a subject position, constraining for me at times, but claimed for what it offered. The difficulties in my communities of work stayed put, excluded from this discourses by both my physical absence and the exclusionary power of a white middle-class home.

Conclusion

The disjunctive narratives, narratives of power and subjection, framed by the expectations and place of home will be expanded upon in subsequent Chapters. I do not want to suggest that the familiarity of home in some way foreclosed the opportunity to thinking carefully of the kinds of moral commitments that were part of these women's stories. In particular, in the next chapter, I describe how women subvert normative discourses in various ways because of their moral commitments to clients and each other. In this Chapter, however, I raised the idea of settled expectations in terms of expanding the notion of nonunitary subjectivity and especially, I wanted to explore the idea that multiplicity is something we "do" rather than something that happens to us. This view of active construction of differing political identities is not meant to speak against the idea that we are relationally formed, but to open up the possibility not only of resisting discourses and emplotting our own lives, but also of a robust sense of where some of that resistance can take us in terms of our moral lives.

Elsewhere I have spoken about the potential of a post-structuralist project to engage in positive uncertainty in terms of our placement within certain discourses. This is to suggest a model of subject formation, which is more "fluid." The meanings of gendered practices and their "political articulations" cannot be guaranteed (Probyn, 1990). Placed alongside Walker's (1998) expressive-collaborative model of moral actions, it is important to note that we are differentially subjugated, our oppressions are not of a piece and while we may stand somewhere in the middle of the pack in relation to positions of power, some political articulations require more than unsettled talk. They require a willingness to travel to places where our settled expectations are engaged.

Chapter Five, *Administration as Subversion*, examines one strategy of engagement for women as they recognise and resist the discursive structures of the working lives, and raises the question on how far that kind of engagement can take us in terms of establishing discursive spaces in which to do our work.

CHAPTER FIVE: ADMINISTRATION AS SUBVERSION

A woman I interviewed talked about a government policy she was responsible for evaluating. It is a very public policy aimed at fundamental changes in the administration of the communities, but she is not sure of the motivation of the legislators. Nonetheless, she tells me, good work can be done while understanding that the outcomes of her department must be consonant with the objectives of the policy makers. She can work with the policy to accomplish this, but accomplish other work as well that she sees as the positive potential in this policy and the funds behind it:

> I mean I have felt like a subversive most of my career. I mean I really do. Even coming and setting up the literacy program in terms of what the government thought it wanted to do or what it was investing in. I'm sure there wasn't a whole lot of consistency between what they thought it was and what I knew it to be. But if certain outputs and outcomes are still there, they're happy and you know you're accomplishing something important and tangible. And I think that's got to be one serious definition of subversion.

I am admiring of the skills subversion must take. This woman must understand, in all of its complexities, a policy that would be variously understood by different politicians and managers, and the stake each of those individuals might have in the outcomes of the policy's implementation. She must respond to these policies on a political level as a senior manager, but she must also have enough savvy to make the policy malleable enough on the local and community level for outcomes appropriate to the community to be possible. This takes tremendous skill, I think, listening to her. It is not the only time I have heard this kind of story of working within policy structures on varying levels, satisfying both the policy architects as well as manipulating the structures to satisfy other often unstated goals.

In chapter four, *Administration as Road Trip*, I posed questions of how women carry on their work against the backdrop of various expectations others have of them, and how they should or ought to act. I explored how these expectations bear relation to expectations we have of ourselves, and how those expectations, in turn, are shaped by how known the context is in which that work is carried out.

I suggested that we can perform roles based on our expectations of others, which may or may not be legitimate, but we are also performed by particular discourses. How these two ways of being interact depend on particular work circumstances and our approach to them. In one case, the case of bringing largely unexamined expectations with us, what takes place at meetings with Band Managers as I described in the Prologue, may be difficult and uncomfortable, but it is in some sense, not fully understood. Despite the intensity of the experience at the time, and the resulting reflection on why things went the way they did, I can return safely to my home, and leave the disruption behind me.

I also posed questions about why we could talk about the discomfiture in community work or on the road with some ease compared to the stories we return to again and again about particular work relations back at the bureaucracy. The freedom to reflect and theorise about community or cross-cultural work is curious to me. On one level, these reflections, although continually tested against actual practice, are still suppositions about contexts that are to a large extent, opaque. I suggest this has something to do with the extent to which we become conscious (or remain unconscious) of our own settled expectations around positions of privilege.

In this chapter I examine events where if not our expectations, at least our agendas are clear to us. We are called upon to act with some subterfuge in order to carry out programs or policies that we know will have considerable impact on our workplaces or in the communities. Women subvert political and work related agendas, and support each other in actions that accomplish an amazing number of objectives in response to commitment to one kind of community or another. This chapter examines these actions in light of the idea of agency, and what it means to resist discourse. I look at how it can sometimes appear that even though we are buying the party line, it is done with clear intent and towards *our own* purposes, even as those purposes operate within the constraints of a particular discourse; in this case, the nature of oganizational discourse as it has been historically constructed from a male perspective.

As well, this chapter addresses two additional ideas. I expand upon and clarify notions of how we are agents within certain discursive constructions. Second, I am interested in discovering what forms subversion takes within these constructions. I found, through my conversations with women administrators, that it at least seemed possible to enact our will in contexts where we felt constrained by our organizations. Even though this enactment was problematized to an extent in chapter three because of our moral accountability to communities (Walker, 1998), the women in this research showed various ways of taking action with what resources were available or apparent to them. As Walker (1998) remarks, "We are neither unfortunate enough to have to go it alone in trying to find and keep an acceptable and vital moral order in our lives nor lucky enough to have the last word on whether we have succeeded" (p. 63). Stories in chapter five highlight the communal aspects of our work in ways that promote or protect clients and women colleagues, often to ensure they are not going it alone. However, judging the "success" of these actions needs to take into account not just our moral accountability but also the range of possibilities given our placement, organizationally.

However, this chapter also considers whether it is possible to subvert an organizational agenda, given its location in a discourse that both produces and answers its own question, a discourse which has "its own truth effects" (Knight and Morgan, p. 253, 1991). Women in this research did speak of circumstances where they were frustrated in their attempts to accomplish certain goals, despite intentional actions and various strategies. I had one such experience with a particular program where, despite my efforts, the actions of others in and outside the organization determined a certain direction. This experience raised questions about how programs are strategically managed by soliciting input from staff and then discounting it for what seems like a predetermined course of action. Was I wrong about this? Was our resistance irrational? Was it our own actions that were the problem? The outcome of this experience is significant for my discussion around the extent to which our subversive ways accomplish what we hope for and what the cost of this type of action is for women. How much subversion is possible and what kinds of circumstances make this kind of action possible?

Discourse and Agency

Before I examine some of the possibilities of agency within Northern organizational discourse, I will re-examine the idea of agency as discursively constructed. Hartman (1991) sees agency and discourse as reciprocally constitutive and as one appears to problematize the other, the discussion in the next section will treat them together.

In chapter three, I explored the idea of agency as it related to ideas of autonomy and integrity, using Walker's work (1998) on an expressive-collaborative framework to establish moral accountability. In this framework, Walker suggests that integrity cannot be taken to mean acting on our own self-referential course in matters of moral obligation and response. We need to establish our moral accountability to others in our communities, those who reasonably expect us to respond in certain ways. This framework is important to this research, because in Walker's view, integrity does not mean living a certain kind of life, executing and defending our actions only in reference to our self-understanding. She advocates a view of an ethic of responsibility, which entails acting in accordance with our moral commitments to others. This means we tell stories and establish narratives of moral commitment which are both individual, as a result of our agency in determining our actions, but also public. How others respond to our actions and accounts of them partly determine what kind of moral account we are given.

Other aspects of the stories I thus far explored include the idea of settled expectations around our travel and work in the North, and the relation of these expectations to ideas of nonunitary subjectivity. I suggested that it is possible to engage in actions where our expectations become unsettled as self-conscious engagement. I further suggested that feelings of dissonance around work, especially times in our lives (and stories) where we speak of our power in one moment and dismiss it in the next, was not a full enough account of nonunitary subjectivity. I also suggested that our ensemble subjectivities (Walker, 1998) result both from layers of moral meaning in our lives and the shifts that may occur when we engage our own expectations to explore our positions in a relational framework.

Both our engagement of our expectations and our moral narratives are agentic notions, "self-conscious engagements" (Campbell, 1999); different subject positions can be sought through our understanding of our unearned advantage over others or they can be occasioned by unusual or cataclysmic life events.

In this chapter, I am interested in self-conscious engagement with our organizations, and whether this engagement provides evidence of multiple subjectivities that involves more than feeling dislocated. Key to this discussion is the idea of discourse and the question, "What kind of subjects can we be in contemporary organizations" (Calais and Smircich,1992, p. 232)? If organizational discourse constructs women as subjects in particular ways, the nature and extent of our subversive activities may also be inscribed by this discourse. Whether we successfully negotiate different subject positions may not be a result so much of how agentic we are but what space is allowed us by our understanding of the construction of discourse and our ability to work against and within it.

The following story looks at one example of a woman in this research who refuses to take no for an answer as we discuss how she implements her visions and ideas in her organization:

I: How did you set it up, so you could enact visions?
H: Working in this field, a lot of people reported to no experience, no content expertise, your supervisor doesn't have it. Decisions are fiscal vs. it's a bad idea. I guess its not taking no for an answer. When I get a vision, I'm clear on how or why something has to be done, its non-negotiable.
I: How do you work that? What if someone says they don't want you doing something. You just go ahead and do it? On the sly? Convince, talk into…?
H: Persuasiveness…and learning how to function in a government environment. I'm planful, good at strategic thinking, figuring out allies, who do I have to convince…politics…
I: What's involved in understanding the politics of a context?

H: There's levels of politics. You're serving so many masters, feeding different "p's" – you're feeding the outside world in order to demonstrate your value.
I: What does feeding mean?
H: You're talking optics, what makes me look good. And big P's. It comes down to votes. Feeding your superiors, you have to get on to their M.O.'s (modus operandi). For example, Greg, he'd forfeit integrity to look good… the big question is what motivates people?

Helen's take on her agency is framed in terms of her understanding of corporate strategy, according to Knight and Morgan (1991), a dominant discourse in organizations. She speaks about "getting on" to what motivates people and what they care about and how that in turn guides their actions and decisions. She thinks "strategically" by planning carefully which includes anticipating resistors and allies to her vision. She also has a clear sense of her own cachet in the department and what she can *get away* with. Below, she tells me about skipping the usual authoritative channels when trying to get an idea out into the field:

H: …so it wouldn't matter what I came up with, she'd (current supervisor) be dead set against it and there'd be a hundred million reasons why that couldn't be done, so of course I'd just forge ahead anyways and we'd be in philosophical arguments all the time. You don't know where she's going to throw up barriers before even exploring it with me or saying, "This is a good idea," or any of those kinds of things and tell me more. So anyways, I thought, "Well I'm not going to let that die. Who's she? She's nobody." So I just went to the ADM (assistant deputy minister) and I said blah, blah, career centers, here's my proposal. He said, "Cool idea. Supes (superintendents) are coming in, why don't you present it to them, let's get their reactions."

She is valued for her work, in many respects, because of her strategic acumen and for Helen, strategy, at least partly, involves what Knight and Morgan describe as "a set of "rational" techniques for managing complex businesses in a changing environment" (p. 251). For Helen, the rational aspects of this discourse, the most salient feature of the discourse of organizational strategy (Knight and Morgan, 1991), means an approach to her work and an expectation of others' work that clearly demarcates her affective life from her working one. Later in the interview, Helen goes on to talk about a work relationship where her supervisor manipulated the situation emotionally:

H: But J, with J, there'd be times when I could actually feel my hair literally stand on end when she would come near me or open her mouth. The hair on my arms would go up. I would have that kind of physical reaction to her. Because of the complete lack of trust. I wouldn't trust her. She wasn't honest with me…wasn't honest with herself. And then all the emotional shit, too. She would, sort of, I guess, I don't know, because she was a social worker, she'd want to hook into me on some sort of emotional level. And I did not like that.
I: What do you mean by that? She would assume…she would talk about how you were feeling? Things like that?
H: Yes, that kind of thing. And I wouldn't want to talk about that. I just wanted to have a professional relationship with her. So there were time, I remember a few times, when she would end up in tears and one of the things she said to me was you manage like a man.
I: That's interesting…
H: And I'd think, what the hell's that supposed to mean? And every time she'd end up in tears when we'd go at it. I'd be just that much more infuriated because I would feel like, you're doing that to manipulate me.
I: The part about the tears or the part about managing like a man?
H: The part about the tears. As things would begin to deteriorate, the communication, she would become more entrenched in the whole emotional sort of pathos of that and I would become that much more clinical and logical.

Borrowing from Knight and Morgan's (1991) analysis of strategic discourse and its effects, one possible reading of Helen's experiences is that because her understandings and actions which she uses to try and subvert organizational rules, are enacted through her office within a government bureaucracy, the effects of that discourse structure, is in part, her uneasiness and dismissal of what is "irrational" about her supervisor's behavior. The effects of strategic discourse are to "reflect and sustain a strong sense of gendered masculinity for male management" (p. 233) partly because strategic discourse is dominated by conceptions of rationality. Interestingly, Helen's boss not only does not think strategically in Helen's view, which already compromises her competence, but she is emotionally manipulative as well. Within the work setting where she and Helen interact, her sins are twofold: her irrationality establishes her outside the discourse of strategy. She then entrenches her "outsiderness" to Helen by accusing Helen of managing like a man, a charge Helen finds ridiculous:

> I: I gather you did not take that (you manage like a man) as much of an insult?
> H: No, I looked at her as we were walking because she was in tears and she said can we go for a walk and I thought to myself, I don't want to go for a walk with you. I just want you to stop crying and do your [expletive] job. But we went outside, and that's what she said. You manage like a man. And of course that infuriated me because I thought, well what the hell is that supposed to mean? You manage like men. It has nothing to do with gender. Like how people manage.

Helen's response to her supervisor, she tells me, is to become increasingly more "clinical" in the face of her supervisor's tears, and conceded that this may be seen as more appropriate to rational male behavior. She rejects the idea, though, that managing in any style can be described by reference to a specific gendered approach.

The above example illustrates the complexities of sorting agency from its surround. Helen's responses to resistance are typically to go around or over the objections of her co-workers, and she is able to do that because she sees strategy as integral to moving any work forward within her department. She believes that the anticipation of others' agendas and needs is imperative to surviving organizational life and acting agentically in terms of her own work. However, while Helen's actions subvert particular oganizational "scripts" (Mangham, 1987), the question remains with respect to what extent her actions fall outside the discourse, that of organizational strategy, that she borrows to describe her actions. In other words, does strategic discourse provide both the resources by which Helen can envision her subversion as well as constrain the form that subversion takes?

But it is not as though Helen moves among cardboard figures on the stage of her own agency or desires. The characters in Helen's story are also subjects within their own stories like the supervisor Helen finds so difficult. Knowing her only through what Helen tells me, I wonder about her own spaces that she seeks to open for her relationship with Helen and how those spaces close through Helen's reaction. I wonder, too, about her view of her own effectiveness against the discourses she finds herself both intercepted by and to which she may also be resisting. Helen tells me another story that had to do with a contract she negotiated with a consultant but neglected to write up correctly. A woman from the accounting division came down to tell Helen they could not pay the contractor; certain procedures had not been followed. Helen's response (strategy) was to dismiss the concerns. She had done her job, she told the accountant, which involved finding someone to do the work. Now it was the accountant's job to figure out how that consultant could be paid. Helen ad-libbed the script of how that meeting would have been anticipated by the accountant (Mangham, 1978).

At the time I heard that story, it immediately brought to mind the number of times I had been involved in similar conversations with the bursar's office of the college, but it would never have occurred to me to ad-lib in such a way. Helen may well have not followed certain procedures but based in my own experience, those procedures are only articulated in "the policy manual" which resides in the accountant's office, and those who are not in the accountant's office either do not have access to this specialized knowledge or even know that they should. When Helen told me this story, I felt admiring – accountants had caused me endless anxiety, and I am sure that such ad-libbing would have taken the accountant in Helen's story completely by surprise; these are not the subversions of office procedures that one is used to. Since then, and in view of Helen's impact on others in her organizational life, she may well have been undermining someone else's organizational position, using strategies for her own ends, unencumbered as she saw it, by any ethical commitments that formed a part of her work relationships. In analyzing Helen's story, then, her resistance to particular discourses, discourses of organizational structure, and compliance with organizational rules, would also be part of the interplay of the office where others were engaged in their own discursive negotiations, both resisting and acquiescing. In my conversations with Helen, our focus was not on these other encounters, but they provide the context now for Helen's story even though they are more than that.

Another conversation illustrates the idea of discourse creating space even though that space sits squarely within discursive conventions that we may find otherwise limiting. In a casual conversation with a woman administrator one day, we talked about what organizations allow or suppress in terms of behavior at committee meetings and how disagreement or conflict with colleagues is expressed. This woman had witnessed the experience of her male predecessor at meetings and how in an otherwise all-male room, the conversations could be blunt or aggressive. Now that she is in the same position, at similar meetings, the men treat her much more chivalrously. They are "nice" to her, she says, probably because they have been brought up to be polite to women. While she suspects that the civility has everything to do with gender, she is using the space that politeness generates to do important work.

Knight and Morgan (1991) see this kind of attention to what organizational discourse will allow as more than coherence to the norms and values of particular organizational cultures, but instead as the contingent results of our engagements in social relations[xiii]. In this way, discourse is more than that kind of coherence; it is the reproduction of truth effects as we navigate communicative and social relations. I take these authors to be supporting Mills' (1989) point about organizations. Mills rejects a functionalist approach to organizational analysis, and points out that the creation, enactment and resistance to rules lead to a dynamic, rather than static, organizational culture. Mill's primary interest is the rules of gender behavior; their constraining function and how they are learned maintained and resisted. Here, Margaret, another woman I interviewed, talks about rules:

I: did someone tell…how do you learn those sorts of rules of the organization?

M: I learned them by watching and searching and asking questions and who answered them was Donna, the secretary or administrator, whatever you call their titles now. But I would ask her. I'd say, "Can I go in to see him or do I make an appointment?" Well, you should make an appointment. So I would.

I: Did most of the people bypass protocol like that?

M: It was always…and of course I wanted to follow rules, but I had to remember whom I was asking the questions of.

Margaret's concern with following the rules grows out of her, at least initial, preoccupation with proving she could do the job. She always felt her style was out of sync with the style of her male supervisors and not until she begins to do her own research in administration, did she find justification and a sense of congruency with what she believes to be the right approach to leadership:

[xiii] Mills (1989) provides a definition of organizational culture that does focus on the nature of collective, rule-bound behavior, but like Knight and Morgan (1991), believes this involves not only following rules, but the processes that enact the rules including those processes which lead to "creation, interpretation and changing" of rules (p. 5). Mills' concern is with the construction and maintenance of gender-rules in which organizations play a crucial role in development.

M: I was reading literature I was reviewing last year and it talked about what does leadership mean and some people generalize and say leadership means controlling and being first and directing and so on, and that bothered me because I didn't feel I could be a good leader using those types of characteristics – the assertive/aggressive type: "You're going to do this because I'm the boss and this is what our supervision is and let's go." Well, I don't believe in that kind, so I always felt that I didn't measure up as a good leader because of that. But when I was reading this other research, it said no, leadership is more of empowerment and it's not taking…it's having control but not taking control…
I: What do you mean by that?
M: …and it's more empowering…being clear on the vision that you see the organization is going and facilitating other people buying in or ownership and then feeling empowered to reach that vision.

Margaret's form of subversion is perhaps, more familiar. She travels to communities and so she sets about consciously building a support network of "good, strong, and I'm going to say most of them, women," to support her. It is this network she calls on to help her implement ideas that her supervisors dismiss. Her ideas keep getting, "shoved off and shoved off," but Margaret carves out space for herself organizationally by reframing the dismissal as a means by which she can do work in a particular area with her community support team. The dismissiveness continues to be difficult but it also means she is left alone, and her work, in the end, has value and usefulness to others in the organization.

Another woman in this research, Rose, navigating organizational discourse from a new position as leader of a non-profit organization, tells me of her uneasiness with what she sees as an increasingly antagonistic relationship with the government bureaucracy she shadows.[xiv] Although on one level, she knows that it is a positive sign that government is finding it impossible to ignore her work, and that her organization has been the catalyst for important work (and funding) in her area, she doesn't like or want the conflict she tells me. Now outside the government (she used to be in the position she is now so often called upon to respond to), she worries about the failure of government departments to engage with the non-profit sector in a productive way.

On a more personal level, her relationships have shifted; she thinks people she once enjoyed good working relationships with in her former position, are angry at the effect she has been able to have on government policy. Her actions have resulted in new directives (much more work!) and have made waves at the legislative level.

Rose accomplished these impacts by strategizing about how best to bring particular issues much more forcefully into the public domain. Like Helen in the earlier example who believes effective strategy depended on her understanding of the politics of her organization, Rose used her historical knowledge of the workings of a department and her understanding of the political dynamics amongst government officials to accomplish her aims. She wrote public documents and letters, and extended personal invitations to meet to public figures that were in opposition to some members of the government. The nature of her non-profit work provided a vehicle for this discontent and whether or not the issue was taken up in a sincere way (Rose has her doubts, but also shrugs about this), it was raised in such a public way that a response was necessary.

While Rose stands apart from the discourse that structured much of her work a few years ago, she is still not completely free of it. Like Helen, she is a competent strategist and her understanding of the discourse of organizations allowed her to understand, in turn, what subversive actions she could take to realize her goals. However,

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[xiv] Taken from notes written after a conversation, rather than from a formal interview process. The research methodology of this thesis allowed for the inclusion of stories gleaned through means other than structured encounters.

she feels ambiguous about the outcomes. She worries that she works on behalf of communities that are not engaged in a meaningful way, and do not completely "buy in" to what she is advocating for on their behalf. She wonders about the meaningfulness of her own work, and whether you can really lay claim to the effectiveness of advocacy when the people you are advocating for are not fully participating. She finds the challenges difficult, especially the loss of former relationships. What accounts for these worries?

One take is that Rose's subjectivity appears still structured, in part, by the organizational discourse she is now charged with subverting. Her former organization was organized bureaucratically because it was a part of central administration. Much of this work involved policy formation with implementation devolved to communities. Rose's background had been with non-profit agencies and community work, so she chafed against the structure of the bureaucracy and believed that this contributed to the confluence of factors that ultimately resulted in her leaving.

Her new role allowed Rose more freedom to structure the work as she saw fit and to re-invent herself to some extent. But she is aware that she has also broken the rules, particularly those related to gender behavior. She has made former colleagues feel uncomfortable, perhaps even betrayed, and as Burrell (1984) has shown, organizational rules have been historically very concerned with separating emotion and organizational life: "human feelings including sexuality have gradually been repulsed from bureaucratic structures and have been relocated in the non-organizational sphere – the world of civil society" (p. 99). This has been deliberate, Burrell believes, and accomplished through a number of organizational forms. Rose has resisted the carefully maintained emotional neutrality of the organization, but the breaking of that rule has come at the cost of relationships, she believes.

As well, as Walker (1998) discusses, Rose's narrative of relationships and her moral commitment to others have changed. She feels keenly the vulnerabilities of the communities she works for in this particular area, and her working life has been spent responding to them on some level. She has acted with a kind of integrity in this regard -- a very clear figure based on what she believes to be the value and values of this work, and she expresses this ethic of responsibility in relation to her communities and colleagues, so there is no question about where she stands and what she believes on this issue. She has had to rethink her former work relationships, however, as they have moved to the periphery of her concerns. Part of this is a result of her commitment to the work, but also, her understanding of their relative power to her clients and her agency around what it is she can pay attention to morally, given the resources at hand.

But still she worries. She does not feel completely at home in her new subject position. *She* is also peripheral, moved to the edges by the discourse of the bureaucracy, an action also accomplished in a number of effective, and deceptively simple ways such as leaving her group off agendas on the issues, setting dates for meetings and then canceling, not returning phone calls, acting unfriendly in chance encounters – a number of strategies familiar to many subordinated individuals. The bureaucracy failed to control Rose with the rules; it could not get her to comply, so it repulsed her and her emotions.[xv]

[xv] "To be firmly located in the public realm today is, for the most part, to be embedded within bureaucratic discourse; to be firmly grounded in the non-bureaucratic is to be removed from the arenas available for public speech" (Ferguson in Mills, 1989, p. 9). Part of Rose's resistance to bureaucratic discourse was to *access* public arenas where she did not personally have a voice, but her strategy was carried forward for her by public male figures.

In Knight and Morgan's words (1991), the organization "focuses on individuals who are transformed into subjects whose sense of meaning and reality becomes tied to their participation in the discourse and practice of strategy" (p. 232). I would add to this that this sense of meaning also involves the reward of privileged organizational positioning. It is not only relationships that were at stake for Rose but also the rewards of compliance: conferences, the opportunity to participate in government directives and so on. While Knight and Morgan's interest was specifically the rise and maintenance of strategic discourse, I believe work has broader implications for other organizational discourses, particularly ones of collusion and reward. In Rose's case, part of her sense of meaning and reality is still tied to her former employer, even as she negotiates a different subject position, and this sense of meaning involves her awareness of what she has given up.

Another participant, Jean, talks about her strategic approach to working with her supervisor:

J: With M, what I did I think very deliberately was to give her no cause to find fault. It's sort of like I was always very honest and said this is what you get. I'm not deceiving you, I'm not hiding anything form her, I'm not playing any games around her, but because she does that so much herself, she always is suspicious of what other people are doing.[xvi]

The fact that this was a situation that needed to be strategically managed at all was a source of frustration for Jean, because it involved strategically managing a woman, and Jean talked about the responsibility women in management had for those who came after them:

J: Although then I must say, it sort of…it kind of pisses me off in a certain way when I see woman in certain positions have the opportunity for real positive influence…
I: And they don't…
L: And they don't because they…so there's so few of them in middle management that when then get there, you think for God's sake, it kind of drives me a little bit when you try to negotiate something with them, I have some sense of responsibility to the other women

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behind me to try and do the job the way…well, in some ways I think we have a kind of responsibility that way.

To subvert the agenda of organizational strategies requires a meta-awareness of how it is we are participating in the discourse and to see the "truth effects" the ways in which the discourse both poses and answers its own questions. Subversion requires openness to different interpretations of our own actions. This is a form of agency that allows us to step apart from the self-discipline the particular strategy requires (Knights and Morgan, 1991). However, even when woman distanced themselves from the discourse of their organizations, even when they had the ability to *describe it in those terms,* they still often drew from it and engaged in actions that depended, to a large extent, on what had already been established for them.

Subversion involves tactics of trying to reposition oneself within a discourse and to look for the spaces that repositioning creates. For Rose, this re-creation has everything to do with authenticity even while she knows on some level that she is doing the work that is both personally fulfilling and professionally effective. For Jean, she often resents the fact she needs to engage with these discourses at all. For Margaret, the rejection of her roles and ideas by her male supervisor frees her to pursue her own work in areas she creates with her network.

I believe that the rules of discourse operates as such a powerful organising and constraining tool for women because of the notion of compliance and, as the politics of the office go, the opportunity to exchange good behaviour (thought to be gender appropriate behaviour for women at any rate) for the opportunities and resources an organization can offer.

Conclusion

In his 1988 Chapter, Burrell discusses Foucault's work on discipline and his contribution to organizational theory. Foucault's work provides the opportunity for fruitful debate on the nature and direction of organizational analysis. In particular, the global nature of discipline, particularly as it relates to the control of sexuality and the relation of this to the body politic, Burrell suggests, can lead to a significant "reordering of work" in organizational analysis.

Burrell (1988) also discusses Giddens' argument against the Foucauldian analysis of the prison as archetype of the disciplinarian institution and how all other institutional discipline is to a lesser extent, a descendent of the organizing power of prisons. Giddens' main point of disagreement is that we move in out and of organizations, when we go home at the end of the day, crossing a boundary that separates the organising life of the our institutions from "civil" society.

Elsewhere I have spoken about the juxtaposition of cross-cultural work and "home" in the same sense of crossing boundaries, but primarily as a discussion around the maintenance of expectations that, in turn, maintain a particular place of power and privilege. While I conflated the home and "the office" in contrast to the life on the road, Giddens' idea of crossing a metaphorical line which releases one from the discursive power of organizations is meant to rebut the idea that our organizational life follows us home in the literal sense that one would experience in a prison. Burrell believes that Giddens misses the point. In his words, "the real point is not that most of us do not live in carceral institutions and can therefore escape from their discipline but that, as individuals, we are incarcerated within an organizational world" (p. 232).

This chapter has also been exploring the nature of subversion in view of the fact that subversive acts are never completely outside organizational discourse, particularly strategic discourse. I have suggested that we do travel, crossing boundaries from the difficult to the expected and back again, but I also do not want to suggest that home represents some safe haven, free from the constraints of disciplinary discourse, as I believe Giddens thinks of home (in Burrell, 1988, p. 232).

The main point is that women, whether at work or at home, or even on the road, do not escape the effects of discourse, particularly discourse that structures gendered relationships. This structuring begins long before we get to work, and continues after we leave, and part of what we learn through the rules of our institutions is to behave as we are expected to; to learn and follow, often implicit, rules and to be good.

The discourse that minimises or trivialises gender structures the interaction of the workplace and poses a particular kind of difficulty for women. To be authentic in the role, as in the case of Rose of the non-profit sector, your own discourse must be grounded in the "good" of the student or client – any reference to your own experiences as a manager and a woman may not seem selfless enough. Yet, the discourse of the organization that does not allow for the creation and exploration of new discursive spaces creates the social conditions under which women find it most difficult to be effective. By not being "tough" enough, or worse being "too nice," the social order of the organization is both accomplished and maintained by discursive constructions that favour rational, apolitical and unemotional responses to conditions inside an organization and the chaos of external conditions that rational, strategic behaviour is able to control. These kinds of controlling features of the context and the discourse foreshorten the possibility of a resistant discourse around values other than those described by rationality.

For some women, like Helen, the discourse that subsumes gender identity does not appear as especially problematic:

I: What do you think? Do you think there is any difference with gender styles? Any difference between you and other women at work?
H: Okay. I think I have less emotion tied up in my management style than a lot of women have. So I'm not as likely to get hooked into the emotional aspects of people's lives.
I: Because you're not interested, or you think it deters from the work…?
H: It's not that I'm not interested, but I think that we're there to do a job. And so I'm not here to be your social worker. I'm here as your manager and we've got a lot of work to do.

Later Helen talks about having more tolerance for the emotions of her co-workers, but she says:

H: I can't say there's a lot of it that goes on. Like right now we have a fairly wired group of women who all have this kind of wild and crazy sense of humour. There's almost a group sense of personality I would say, within that division. So the woman all tend to be the same in a lot of ways in terms of poking fun at things or tongue in cheek, sarcasm, that kind of stuff in order to survive, I guess, instead of a lot of weeping or "woe is me" or self pity…

Helen sees herself as a strategic actor, and the discourse of power and subjection does not seem to co-exist coherently for Helen in her talk about work; taken together, ideas such as gender inequality and personal agency are too discontinuous for her (Chase, 1995). At the same time, she has created a discursive space for herself within her organization by having particular expertise in a field, and by creating a persona for herself around her work ethic, her strategic and organizational savvy, and her relationships with other women who form a pocket of daily resistance to the organization.

When I reflect on my own manner of resistance over the years, the stories are overlaid time and again with often buoying conversations with other women who found themselves wondering it if was really worth it. Although they do not regret the subversive actions they took at the time, and often make light of the outcomes, the cost of changed relationships, the unclear impact of their actions, and more drastically, the feeling that they had to leave the organization, leave them suspended in ambivalence about the nature of agency and what a truly agentic working life looks like. When these women are together, celebrating the beginning of a Northern Spring, or travelling to a meeting, they form a community that provides both uptake and sympathy for the expression of ambivalence, and satisfies, for the moment, the need to look and feel competent in the organizational world. Yet, the need to resist and to locate that resistance in a community continues as a dominant theme, far from being described as serving the interests of the maintenance of discourse. The women engage in "double-voiced" discourse as a way of speaking that simultaneously uses and subverts dominant discursive forms. (Jacobs and Munro, 1995, p. 2).

In Chapter Six: *Administration as Agentic Possibilities*, this way of speaking, as it is conflated with subjectivity, continues to pose challenges to a robust sense and nature of nonunitary subjectivity and the corresponding idea of the role of agency in resistance and construction of normative discourse. In this, the concluding Chapter of this research, I try for a final articulation of the tension between a modernist view of autonomous choice and the post-structuralist view of constrained choice. I attempt to claim intermediary space between these two posts, for an idea of narrative agency, which draws, for resources, from both normative discourse and resistant possibilities.

CHAPTER SIX: ADMINISTRATION AS AGENTIC POSSIBILITIES

In the following interview segment, one of the research participants, Jean, is describing her approach to chairing a meeting:

I: So chairing a meeting is difficult because it's potentially conflictual or politically conflictual?

A: Chairing a meeting where you bring people from different departments, I tend to do a lot of that because in my job, my experiences as an adult educator and becoming a facilitator, you get to be very good at it. But I've always found it interesting because I think the whole process of chairing or facilitating a group, if it's done well, the way I do it comes out…well for me personally, it comes out of me as a woman which has been the nurturing …the nurturer…the sensitive, the intuitive. Being able to look around the room and read body language, being able to sort of get people to speak up, get people to shut up, and it comes from all of those things that in terms of both my experiences and then the analysis and the reading that I've done and these are women's strengths, women's traits. They come from how we've been socialized and raised but also probably some very deep biological thing as well in terms of our role as primarily being the raisers of the children…the birthing and raising of children. So I find it fascinating, or there's a side of my brain looking back at myself and realizing that what I'm doing is something that's not traditionally associated with women, like it's not usually traditional for example, with Aboriginal men, to have a woman chair a meeting.

I: Right.

A: But I see that what I do is an extension of who I am.

For Jean, there is a fairly untroubled connection between her experiences at work and her experiences as a woman and a mother; she clearly claims what could be thought of as traditional female gender norms as governing her actions at work. She is in a high-level management position within the government, an opportunity, I would think, for there to be if not rupture in her understanding of herself, a fair amount of dissonance. Yet, her responses indicate to me that this is not the case. She has worked hard to arrive at a place where she feels comfortable with who she is and she is clear about that person to her superiors "without being belligerent about it or without being confrontational about it."

Within the context of this research, I am not sure what to make of this story. On the one hand, it seems a straightforward account of how one woman describes herself and the resources that she draws on from within herself, to negotiate the world of administration. On the other hand, she seems to be valorising a certain subject position for women by drawing on what is traditionally thought of women's unique capabilities – nurturance connected to mothering - and I wonder about her own discourse-bound understanding of what subject positions are available to her in this organization, given her life experiences and her experiences at work. Is it the case that in the face of competing discourses, one of rational administration and one of female nurturance, she feels compelled to choose the position she believes offers her the rewards of complying to particular norms for women? Does she feel compelled to choose at all? It is hard for me to conceptualize the discursive space she sees, if she sees any, and what that might mean to her in terms of how she structures her own position.

These questions depend on a reading of the story that takes, unproblematically, the experience of the story as illuminating reality for Jean, rather than seeing the story as a place to start deconstructing how she was constructed by her experiences even as she (re)constructs them for me. Her explanation of her approach to chairing the meeting contains a sense of agency; she has positioned herself in the story in a certain way, but this positioning necessarily folds back on her own constructions, and the discourses that have constituted them.

Or, it could be the case that Jean *has* struggled with alternate subjectivities. She has become conscious of different subject positions, much like the new mother in Weedon's example (1987), and has become subject to the contradictions as a result of a range of competing discourses. She may have chosen the position of nurturer in the face of this conflict, weighing the cost of other choices. I do not know this about this story, but I do know that this woman also has a rich history of feminism, and that she is intentional around developing networks of support through women colleagues. She tells me about this as critical to keeping her grounded and her work manageable.

The questions about this story are interpretative complexities to discourse analysis. While these complexities enrich the story-telling context, they also pose analytic difficulties. The purpose of this research was to examine the nature of organizational discourses in relation to women administrators' work, and to describe strategies that women employ, working within these discourses as well as at the juncture of competing discourses. But the women do not always articulate these strategies, certainly not in post-structuralist terms. It is left to me, the audience, to try and understand what these stories have said about the possibilities and limits discourse places on us as subjects within our own stories, and also if that leaves any room for an understanding of agency that is not tied to a unified, coherent self.

Another story I read, one in a Masters thesis given to me by the author, Kathleen Purchase, a former colleague, contains similar complexities. Here she describes her induction into a new managerial role:

> In being accepted for the administration position, I expected that my work would be valued and my style of administration would be understood and appreciated. However, I realized that this wasn't so. I met many barriers, which I

> had to identify and manage such as feeling ignored, silenced or not taken seriously in my work. I felt overwhelmed (Purchase, 2000, p. 16).

Her response to the challenges of her new positions, however, was to persist with a particular style, and to work intentionally on building a network of supportive colleagues throughout her administrative area. She re-routed her work to go around the offices that she could not access, and while she had success in various areas, her inability to accomplish a certain subject position with her male superiors, that of parallel authority and power, was a continuing source of frustration. This frustration is familiar in light of other stories in this thesis, and her response is not atypical. She circumvented the dominant discourse rather than persist in trying to access it, and in doing so, she was able to accomplish many things. She learned to live with a certain disappointment about her experiences in that position and countered them with a positive view of her own accomplishments and the strengths and skills those accomplishments required. Both Jean and Kathleen Purchase talk about their subject positions with clarity, 'This is who I am or have become and how I understand myself.'

We cannot avoid authoring our stories without using the pronoun 'I,' but this is not the subject position of the self-constituted "I." "My position is mine to the extent that 'I' – and I do not shrink from that pronoun – replay and resignify the theoretical positions that have constituted me, working the possibilities of their convergence and trying to take account of the possibilities that they systematically exclude" (Butler, 1992, p. 9). We are both the subject and object of our stories and the disciplining power of discourses encourages our self-monitoring and comparison in order to regulate our behaviours with what is considered acceptable and normal. We are rewarded for normal behaviours and punished, although not in the corporeal sense, for behaviours that stand outside the rules of the dominant discourse. However, those behaviours that do fall outside acceptable discursive rules are the behaviours that reveal the possibilities of other discourses, other subject positions (Hardin, 2000). Jean adopts a subject position from the discourses available to her that calls forth a traditional view of women's capabilities and strengths. However, in this instance, it is a subject position that stands as an oppositional account to what the discourses of administration generally require of women, although gender discourse operates at such a pervasive level, it is almost impossible to escape its constitutive effects (Butler, 1992; Flax, 1992).

In this concluding chapter, I want to summarize what I have learned, through this research, with respect to the nature of women's experiences as subjects of available and circulating discourses that constitute them and especially, their administrative work. In analysing the strategies they employ when confronted with discourses that vie for their allegiance, I have also explored the concept of agency, and what agency might be conceived of as in light of the constituting nature of discourse, but also in the context of work in the North. It is significant to keep the context of this research in mind, as much of the theoretical work references this context specifically in terms of particular constraints as well as particular obligations, as I saw them, to other characters in our Northern stories.

To begin with, I return to Joan Scott (1992) who asks, "How can we write about identity without essentializing it?" For her this question is connected to one that precedes it with respect to "historicizing" experience. For Scott, this project involves taking experience as that which helps us to understand the processes by which "identities, are ascribed, resisted, or embraced and which processes themselves are unremarked, indeed achieve their effect because they haven't been noticed" (p.33). Scott understands the anxiety that attends theory that posits the shifting of old identities and the emergence of new ones as we are structured by dominant discourses. However, like Hartman (1992), Scott (1992) does not accept that the rejection of the modern "I" leads to the wanton disbursement of our agency:

> And subjects do have agency. They are not unified, autonomous individuals exercising free will, but rather subjects whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on them. Being a subject means being subject to definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents and conditions of exercise. These conditions enable choices, although they are not unlimited. Subjects are constituted discursively, experience is a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside of established meaning), but neither is it confined to a fixed order of meaning. Since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as individual. (p. 34)

When the women in this research describe what it means to be a woman administrator in the North, is it possible to talk about this identity apart from the social and moral constraints in which that identity is enacted (Scott, 1992)? It is clear that because we cannot speak outside of language, our actions are always a discursive event, so too our choices are limited as Scott suggests. Our subject position is bracketed by the limitations of the spoken and textual world around us, but this does not constrain our agency to the extent that we cannot use that language and text intentionally and with self-conscious engagement. Self-conscious engagement occurs at the intersection of competing discourses and at times when women feel unsettled by the choices they understand facing them. These competing discourses create the gaps that allowed women to see other possibilities for themselves. However, the choice to adapt or refine the positions they find themselves in appears to settle them in another discursive realm where language re-establishes the truth-power effects of *that* positioning. It isn't clear to me that dissonance or rupture, even given our understanding of multiple subjectivities, is motivation enough to engage in such a politically and personally disruptive project. What calls forth this action to confront dominant discourses?

In thinking through that question, I have used Walker's (1998) framework of relational ethics to discuss ideas related to the construction of narratives (stories) that provide narrative continuity to our moral lives. Formed relationally, these stories are ones we tell other and ourselves about our commitment to moral relationships, identity and values. Walker's framework, for this research, provided a way to see the formation of our subjectivities and our agency as discursively constructed, but also as linked to the ethics of our working context.

This way of thinking about discourse, subjectivities and agency became important as I worked through the analysis of the stories in chapter four. Using the metaphor of the 'road trip,' I looked at how we come to understand our subjectivity in places of epistemological uncertainty. Again, drawing on Walker (1998) and her discussion with respect to integrity, women in this chapter experienced the effects of constituting discourse in various ways, but still held over-arching positions of narrative authority and status relative to the communities in which they did their work. The strategies women used in this chapter often included turning aside from the difficulty of unfamiliar contexts, but I discussed the ways in which attending to these feelings of dissonance may be what creates the discursive gaps for rethinking both our positions and the possibilities of agency of a certain kind. In keeping with Walker's idea of "ensemble subjectivities," I suggested that self-conscious engagements with expectations of work at home and on the road were necessary to move our subjectivity and agency in a certain ethical direction.

In chapter five, I looked again at strategies that women employ when directly confronted with social constraints in their organizations, and how those constraints, while limiting their actions also produced opportunities, often in the form of trying to subvert the rules of particular organizational discourses. The question remains whether one can be said to be engaged in actually subverting dominant discourses rather than resisting them and further discussion around the difference between the two is needed. However, it was the actions that women engaged in, working between discourses that seemed to be the most obvious places where they became aware of other subjective opportunities being open to them. Sometimes they embraced these alternatives, sometimes not, but in all cases, they remained at least partially constituted by that which they consciously resisted. Both of these analytical chapters were concerned with understanding women's experiences as they placed themselves and were placed subjectively by the discourses and contexts of their work.

Weedon describes our placement in discourse and the fluid nature of the construction of our subjectivity in the following passage:

> The fixing of meaning in society and the realization of the implications of particular versions of meaning in forms of social organization and the distribution of social power rely on the discursive constitution of subject positions from which individuals actively interpret the world and by which they are themselves governed. It is the structures of discourses, which determine the discursive constitution of individuals as subjects. Yet discourses located as they are in social institutions and processes are continually competing with each other for the allegiance of individual agents. The political interests and social implications of any discourse will not be realized without the agency of individuals who are subjectively motivated to reproduce or transform social practices and the social power which underpins them. (p. 97)

This subjected motivation, I believe, can be characterized or more helpfully thought of as framed ethically. It is not the *outcomes* of our actions that tell the whole story of our agency, just as it is not our self-referential understanding of the rupture of our narratives that lends a particular strength to the concept of shifting subjectivities. Most of the choices around the positions we take up are often framed by/within our 'proper' or moral response to the responsibility of the collective (Davies, 1990) through which we, at any particular time, are constituted. Therefore, our agency in the liberal, humanist sense, "goals-means-end" (Davies, 1990), is based precisely on a reading of the effectiveness of the "end" in relation to our goals. Davies' (1990), attempt to rehabilitate a concept of agency has to do with the choices one makes among accepting that assignment as non-agentic, refusing to participate in the discourse or finding or creating access to different discursive practices which redefine the discursive event (Davies, 1990). Her definition of agency moves the discussion away from the subjective, knowing actor while acknowledging that agency is, itself, a discursive construction. However, Davies does not give a complete account of what would call forth our repositionings, our reworking of the discursive materials at hand when we are motivated to do so.

As Francis (1999) concludes, in an article detailing the debate between the extent that post-structuralism can prove useful to feminist research aims:

> While we may agree theoretically that the self is constituted through discourse, we still feel ourselves to have agency, moral obligation, and preferences for different kinds of discourse; and that creating narratives to structure, or describe our lives, is part of being a human subject. We can sometimes choose to resist certain discourses and encourage others. I can sometimes recognise when I am being constituted through discourses of gender dualism, and choose whether to draw on alternative discourse to resist such positioning (p. 8).

I have been concerned with re-conceptualizing agency along the lines that Francis (1999) describes, but I believe that agency of the kind I have attempted to describe connects us both to our stories and to each other in communities of moral responsibility (Walker, 1998). This is the agency that both Walker (1998) and Hartman (1991) speak about in terms of the production of narratives that give our life both coherence and meaning. I have attempted to show, though, that this agency does more than just the work of this kind of coherence. It also at the heart of the construction of possibilities for us. This kind of coherence is necessary for us to be able to identify the shape of our resistant discourses and the space for resistance when we happen upon it. Agency allows us to recognize the possibilities for ourselves, not just in a self-referential way, but also as space that we create for others through our narratives of relationships (Walker, 1998). In this way, I have tried to make a case for agency of a sort that is intertwined with commitment, both being necessary for certain kinds of narrative, narrative of a fuller sense than a view from the bottom. This seems to me to be not just a question of our own reclaiming "discourse in use" (Bacchi, 2000) but a moral project that gives our administrative lives necessary weight. This has been particularly important to the context of this thesis, educational work in the North. The relationship between agency and the self, however, still poses difficulties; this project still seems to require some reconciliation between the constructs of subjectivity and agency.

Rather than thinking of a fragmented "I," a more positive conceptualization of subjectivity may be "an ongoing process of engagement in social and discursive practices…a continuous process of production and transformation [and] a 'doing' rather than a being" (Robinson, 1991, p. 11). This re-establishment of nonunitary subjectivity has been critical in opening up the possibility of women's lives that are not all of a piece in terms of, most importantly, their subjugation, and I have tried to show in this research that the resistance to this subjugation takes varied and often creative forms. But that is not all there is to it, or to the stories.

This process of subjectivity, the "doing," accomplishes not just our claiming of authorial status, nor the possibilities of experiences and expression of power, but is also the "doing" that is necessary for our own reflection. I would argue that if we only speak through established discourse, it is not clear to me that as theorists or just listeners, we can determine that it is a case of what Blooms worries about: "women often describe their feelings, experiences, hopes and identities in ways that live up to conventional patriarchal notions of being female made available to them by master narratives, as in the femme fatales and ideal mothers or matrons" (Bloom, p. 6). This is exactly what I did not find in this research -- the situating of women as characters or archetypes in someone else's stories. I also believe that, leaving aside whether hoped for outcomes were achieved, an awareness of how ones' actions change the working landscape lends support to the idea of a self, however discursively constructed, as still capable of the self-awareness that allows for agency. Rose, in chapter three, felt the disengagement of her former colleagues and friends keenly and this led her to question herself around her commitments to her work. I also argued in that chapter, that Rose was not completely free of the discourse she was resisting. However, resist she did and on a conscious, planful and strategic level, born primarily although I would guess, not exclusively, out of her narrative of commitment to the projects she ran.

I do believe that the process of subjectivity as one of agentic engagement also means a call for engagement with those who populate our narratives, both in authorial positions below and above us. The idea of ensemble subjectivities (Walker, 1998) describes a layered subjectivity that displaces the autonomous "I," but does not completely negate it. We have the possibility of various narrative strands, some chosen, some imposed, but they are intertwined in such a way that the "self" has some coherence. We recognize those strands as belonging to *us*. We have constructed these narratives against the backdrop of our histories, re-shaped them as our lives and relationships change, discarded some and kept others, but they are ours, all the same.

There is a singularity at the heart of the women in this research, such that I would suggest that they, through the various strategies they use to cope with the challenges of being women in administration, strive for integration. This seems most apparent to me in reading Kathy Purchase's (2000) research. No matter how many times she was turned aside and denied narrative authority to tell her version of the organization, she returned "home," to herself, her experiences and their impact on her life. From this basis, she traveled again to construct new narratives of relationships. It was through this work, also carefully planned and strategized that she was able to accomplish her organizational aims. There is always an essential tension in these stories: engagement versus internal fragmentation, but I would suggest that it is narrative that holds the coherence of our selves together.

When Bloom (1996) asks how women can speak autobiographically without producing stories that suggest a coherent representation of the self, it is not clear that she is asking the right question. Bloom suggests that coherence necessarily and falsely represents our entrapment in what she describes as the "pervasive hierarchical, patriarchal structuring of sexual difference" (p. 3). A better question I believe is whether the coherence of these narratives is intentional and a result of our expression, through relationships, and within communities, with the people we care about and are committed to (Walker, 1998). The women in this research claimed coherent selves. When I asked them, “Is there a “self” that you care about? Is there something essential about you that you can identify and that you feel is threatened?” They responded positively. It was their desire to look competent, their desire to be taken seriously, their care for and valuing of women colleagues and friends, their ability to sustain relationships, through doing work that had significant and positive impact in the communities. I heard, in those times, the narratives that Walker (1998) was talking about, narratives of relationships, moral values and moral identity, which the woman felt sustained a particular story they told me about themselves. Often these desires were set against the background of constraints, but they were not unwitting in their understanding of this. It was the dissonance when they met these constraints that occasioned their search for ways of inserting themselves into new discourses in agentic ways.

From my early days in Wha ti, to my research position as interpreter and teller of stories and my work today, I can see how my own identity, my own understanding of the way I am and act in this world, shifts below me as I confront the challenges of organizational work. But I cannot claim the innocent position I once did. Through the complexities and challenges of my work as an administrator, I find myself looking for the open spaces my own agency may create for me, but I know, and post-structuralism has given me a way to describe this, that some ways of understanding and behaving will be foreclosed to me while others open up. Although I feel a kind of nostalgia for the days of grammar drills in the home economics room and coffee with the nurse, I know now, that this kind of innocence would have had to be deliberately maintained at the cost of understanding what the social and historical constructions of my identity meant in that context. On the whole, I do not wish for that kind of innocence again. I must take responsibility as Flax (1992) says, "to firmly situate (ourselves) within contingent and imperfect contexts, to acknowledge differential privileges of race, gender, geographic location, and sexual identities and to resist the delusory and dangerous recurrent hope of redemption to a world not of our own making" (p. 460). To embrace the ambiguities and discomfort of such positioning is the post-structuralist project of positive uncertainty, the accomplishments of which agency related to an ethical framework may make possible.

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